



THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE



**Edited by
Paul Rajashekar
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**Theology in the Context of Religious
and Cultural Plurality in Asia**

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LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Department of Church Cooperation
and
Department of Studies

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We also wish to express our gratitude to the Lutheran Church in Korea for hosting the symposium.

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FOREWORD

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One of the major tasks of Lutheran theologians in Asia is to understand and interpret Luther and the Lutheran heritage in the Asian contexts, to meaningfully define the Lutheran identity in our contexts respectively, and to try to apply the findings to the Asian soil. This effort is also an important part of the contextualization of the Gospel in the Asian contexts.

The APATS (Asian Programme for Advancement of Training and Studies) Symposium under the theme "Theology in Dialogue," involved 32 persons from various parts of Asia and elsewhere and met in Seoul, South Korea, December 11 to 17, 1987. Its task was to consider the opportunities and challenges of "doing theology in the context of religious and cultural plurality." This conference is the first of a new series of symposia sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation, Department of Church Cooperation, and follows on three earlier symposia (APATS Luther Studies Symposia) held in various Asian capitals between 1980 and 1984:

1. Luther Studies Symposium I (Hong Kong 1980)
"The Augsburg Confession in Asia Today"
2. Luther Studies Symposium II (Bangkok 1982)
"Luther's Thought on Nature and the Natural
in the Asian Context"
3. Luther Studies Symposium III (Manila 1984)
"The Holy Spirit and Christian Witness in Asia"

All papers and reports of these three meetings have been published as **APATS Luther Studies Symposia**, Geneva, LWF/DCC, 1985.

Through presentations, reactions and discussions, in groups as well as in plenary, all participants were stimulated and encouraged to the thinking and commitment in vital areas of our Christian faith and practice, although at times we had to realize how different and diverse Asia is. But the need for inter-faith dialogue was commonly acknowledged and its practice seen as a challenge to all Christians, whether on the level of personal encounters of daily life or in the formal meeting of specialists engaged in theoretical or theological discussions. At the same time risks that are necessarily connected with such dialogues were mentioned and recognized as related to our Christian faith and witness in our own contexts. Thus we again affirmed that

"we recognize the pluralistic nature of our Asian scene and at the same time we profess both the uniqueness and the universality of the Christian gospel as we give witness to it". We also emphasized that "it is our task to communicate the Gospel in its core meaning to the people of Asia," as was stated in the final report of the Manila Symposium (Symposium III, p. 296).

At this point I would like to express our gratitude to the Rev. Satoru Kishii, Asia Secretary of LWF/DCC, for his support and hard work to make these symposia possible. We also express our appreciation to Dr Paul Rajashekar of LWF/DS, not only for his presentation at the symposium but also for his efforts and that of his colleagues in the Department of Studies to prepare this report. My gratitude also goes to the members of the preparatory committee for their help and support.

Tokyo-Mitaka
October 1987

Yoshikazu Tokuzen
Chairperson
Preparatory Committee

J. Paul Rajashekar

INTRODUCTION: THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE

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The theme and sub-themes of the 1986 APATS Symposium are by far the most challenging themes chosen for this LWF sponsored series of symposia. It may be recalled that the idea of such symposia originally grew out of a desire among Lutheran theologians, leaders and theological educators in Asia to reflect together on their theological concerns in relation to the religious and cultural context in Asia. This concern was especially prompted by a need to grapple with the meaning and relevance of their inherited theological tradition in the Asian situation. "Faithfulness" to the past and "relevance" in the present are the twin challenges that every theological tradition worth the name must invariably address in every generation. The heirs of Lutheran tradition in Asia can hardly evade this task and the APATS Symposia were conceived to facilitate such a collective reflection.

The three symposia held so far were primarily concerned with "Luther studies." They took the themes of the Augsburg Confession and aspects of Luther's thought and explored their meaning and relevance in the Asian religious context.¹ Although these discussions were useful and enlightening in many ways, there seemed to be some ambiguity as to how the insights derived from the Lutheran tradition corresponded to the religio-cultural realities of Asia. Often our attempts tended to juxtapose meanings and insights from tradition with certain challenges emerging from our analysis of Asian realities. There seemed to be a lack of integral relation and it was seldom clear how the two entered into a "dialogue" or "critical encounter."

This difficulty or ambiguity lies in the fact that much of Lutheran theological reflection in Asia tends to be either a "translation" or a restatement of theological meanings and categories of the past into Asian cultural idioms. We are prone to deduce meanings from past formulations and point to their putative relevance in the present context. Such an approach may produce a theology which is faithful and in continuity with our tradition but is hardly equipped to respond to present complexities. It ends up by being a repetition of statements from the context of the past and runs the risk of being superimposed on Asia. Besides, one might ask, what is the "Asian character" of such a theological construction? If we are committed to a theological articulation appropriate to the Asian context, should we not then strive to arrive at theological meanings in a process

of critical encounter or dialogue with the religio-cultural realities and historical processes of Asia? What kind of a critique can be brought to bear upon our theological presuppositions and how are they challenged and chastened by the realities around us? Questions such as these do indeed force Lutherans in Asia to reflect carefully on their mode of doing theology and it was with this concern in mind that the Planning Committee of the 1986 APATS Symposium chose the challenging theme of "Theology in Dialogue."

My introductory paper aims to provide a perspective for approaching this theme and to raise some pertinent issues in relation to the various sub-themes. No attempt is made here to pursue those issues exhaustively. This is a task left to the papers that follow. I hope that this paper, by providing an overview of the main theme, may help us to look more clearly at its various facets. However, one preliminary clarification may be appropriate.

The sub-title of our main theme clearly narrows the focus of our theological reflection to the "religio-cultural" context of Asia. This restriction does not mean that we should ignore another important characteristic of Asian reality: poverty. Ecumenical theological discussions in the past two decades in Asia have repeatedly drawn our attention to two inseparable realities of the Asian situation, namely the overwhelming poverty and the multifaceted religiosity. This interrelatedness of "poverty" and "religiosity" becomes evident when we see that the majority of the poor are not Christian and that therefore their hopes and aspirations in transcending their situation are very much mediated through the language, symbols and idioms of the non-Christian religions.<2>

It is important that we recognize this fact at the outset of our discussions because it will help us to be fully cognizant of the actual realities. This also implies that in all our theological encounters with the religions and cultural realities of Asia we must never ignore the historical and social processes which operate there. Unless our theological articulations speak to the hopes and aspirations of the majority of the poor and oppressed, they run the risk of being simply esoteric statements of a privileged Christian minority. Our theological reflections must therefore express a strong moral commitment to the liberation of the Asian poor. Such a commitment may serve as an important critical principle, not only for evaluating the adequacy and relevance of our theology but also in all our dialogue and en-

counters with the religions and cultural realities of Asia. We shall allude to this critical principle in subsequent discussions.

The challenge of Asian plurality to Christian theology

A fruitful theological reflection in the context of Asian religions and cultures must necessarily begin with an analysis of that context and the challenge it poses. That Asia is an area of tremendous diversity, whether religious, cultural, linguistic, racial or whatever, is obvious and this diversity is very much reflected in each Asian country as well. This diversity and plurality has always been a fact of life in Asia, though Asians in the past seldom developed what we would today call a pluralistic consciousness. A full analysis of this diversity is not necessary here but a few remarks on the character and implications might be in order.

In spite of its diversity, the Asian continent projects a somewhat unitary perspective, especially from the point of view of religiosity. It has been the home of a great many religions and worldviews such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Shinto, Taoism (and one might also include the West Asian or Semitic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam). However, centuries of encounter and cross fertilization among some of these religions have helped to shape the apparently unitary character of Asian religiosity and culture.

It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that Asian religions provide a pivotal point of reference to Asian culture. These religions and worldviews have indeed legitimated Asian societies from times immemorial and have exerted an influence on the faith, values and life styles of the people. As distinct repositories of spirituality, they have evolved their own scriptures, symbol systems, rituals, etc., including sophisticated religious and philosophical reflections reaching to a very great intellectual and mystical depth. The religiousness of these traditions ranges from metatheistic conceptions of divinity to monotheistic, polytheistic and non-theistic conceptions and includes even atheism. Their common thrust has always been very much "soteriological" in the sense of bringing liberation (*vimukti*, *moksha*, *nirvana*) to its adherents.

The challenge of this religiousness to Christian theological reflection lies in its depth and persistence. Almost all Asian

spiritual traditions have been persistent and have more or less successfully withstood the onslaught of such younger religions as Christianity and Islam. Indeed in many instances they have themselves become resilient or resurgent in that encounter through a process of accretism (absorption and accumulation). It is fair to say that the success of Christianity and Islam in Asia has been primarily among the adherents of traditional, primal or cosmic religions, as for example in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, whereas in India and elsewhere they have been successful among the oppressed and marginalized members of classical religions, and that too under the tutelage of invading and occupying powers. If I am not mistaken, it is only in recent years that Christianity, with its Western appeal, has become attractive in some other parts of Asia, such as Korea and China.

The persistence of Asian religiosity is very well attested to in Christian missionary encounters from the 19th century onwards and even earlier. In such encounters Christianity has followed a model of aggression quite characteristic of its history. It has usually looked down upon the values and spiritualities of Asia and has by and large adopted a negative view of them. There were of course notable exceptions, such as Robert de Nobili in India and Matteo Ricci in China, who both attempted to tap the depth of Asian spirituality in the propagation of the Gospel. Their examples have indeed inspired many Christian theologians in Asia in recent decades to engage in "indigenization" or "inculturation" of the Gospel but, however noteworthy, such models of adaptation have not really been free from the negative attitude of Christianity towards others. The Asian religions and cultures became tools for Christian apologetics but were seldom granted any soteriological merit. At best they were treated as *preparatio evangelica*, and in that sense Christianity was seen as the "fulfilment" of all other religions.

This generally negative Christian attitude towards other religions is undoubtedly influenced by a stream of Christian thinking which sets Christ against religions and cultures. It is a stream which goes as far back as the Patristic era, exemplified by the famous statement of Tertullian, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?", meaning that the two represented irreconcilable worlds. In modern forms, the theology of Karl Barth was a clear negation of "religion" itself and opposed to Christian "faith." The influence of such a theology has been very perva-

sive among Asian Christians and has affected their life, theology and worship. It has not only restricted their openness to the positive dimensions of Asian spirituality but has also made it difficult for them to acknowledge the religious diversity around them. This theology of Christ against religions or cultures has been the main source of the identity crisis among Asian Christians; they are part of the Asian culture and are consciously or unconsciously influenced by the values and spiritualities of that culture, and yet they are forced, because of their traditional theological understanding of Christian faith, to negate that heritage. To some extent this anomaly has hindered our search for a relevant Asian theology.

Christians are therefore forced to take the depth and persistence of Asian religiousness into account and to ponder on the role that this should play in their theological articulations. Can Christians continue to deny the legitimacy of Asian religiousness and go on believing that one day all the adherents of other religions will become part of the Christian church? Is it even desirable for Christians to expect that the whole world become Christian, thus obliterating the spiritual contributions that others have made and can make for the wholeness of the world? Do other living religions, by the fact of their existence through the centuries, have any purpose at all in God's plan for the world? If so, how are we to relate to them without denying the uniqueness of our own faith?

These are difficult questions and to answer them will require us to search our own scriptures and other Christian resources. They are new in many ways and our traditions have hardly grappled with them. The challenge of religious plurality is that we cannot avoid asking such questions if we are to be true to our own faith and convictions. They do indeed call for Christian self-introspection and raising them must prompt us to reflect theologically about the significance of other religions for our own faith and to engage in inter-religious dialogue.

There is at present a greater awareness among Christians for the need to develop a proper "theology of religions," a theology which would account for the presence of religious diversity in our midst. Thus the older view of Christ against religions is gradually being revised. Such attempts at theological construction may help to erase a long history of misunderstanding, and indeed often of antagonism, between Christians and those of other communities in Asia. It may help Asian Christians to appre-

ciate the values and richness of other religions and reduce the undue anxieties of being a demographic minority in search of an identity among other majority religious communities.

But the challenge of Asian religious plurality goes deeper than a mere call to construct an adequate theological hypothesis that accounts for the existence of other faiths. Insofar as these religions do exist as a sociological fact, the crucial question is how we can relate to them both practically and theologically. That inter-religious dialogue is of practical necessity is hardly in doubt. But theologically, the existence of religious diversity impels us to do our theological reflections in dialogue and this is something that we need to explore. This is not merely a call to develop a theology of dialogue, i.e. treating inter-religious dialogue as a theological problem, nor simply an attempt at a theology for dialogue, i.e. seeking theological legitimation for our involvement in dialogue. The real challenge of religio-cultural plurality in Asia is to strive for a Christian theological articulation that actually grapples with the truths, hopes, meanings and salvations present within those other Asian religious paths, responding to them by the actual reshaping of our own Christian theology - in dialogue. Here we come to the heart of our theme.

Theology in dialogue

There is a sense in which all theological articulations are engaged in some form of dialogue. One is immediately reminded of St Paul's epistles which are through and through dialogical in character, of the dialogues of some of the famous Church Fathers with their contemporaries, of medieval disputations, of Reformation theses for debate, or even of the works of great 20th century theologians such as Barth (dialectic method) or Paul Tillich (method of correlation). All meaningful theological constructions are therefore in some form and in some measure engaged in a conversation with Christian scriptures, with traditions of the church, with contemporary philosophers or theologians.

Nevertheless, Christian theology as we have come to understand it has been for the most part a strictly domestic or private affair. As an articulation of faith and religious experience, it is based upon an attitude of religious self-sufficiency. Its

canons were dictated by its own traditions, pursued with reference to its own criteria and community. This attitude of self-reference or self-warrant was an inevitable consequence of Christian monopoly over society during much of its history in the Western world. Since many of the classical formulations of Christian theology were adopted in the context of "Christendom," they could hardly be anything but exclusive in character. It was only in the context of medieval Christendom that the formula *extra ecclesia non salus est* (there is no salvation outside the church) made much sense. The religious experience and structures of Christian community therefore became the perimeter within which Christian theology was articulated. This inclusive self-security and self-reference has been the major contributing factor to Christian exclusivism throughout the centuries following the Christian conquest of the Roman Empire and, combined with its missionary spirit, could only be hostile to counter-claims of truth made by other religious faiths.

That such an attitude of self-sufficiency has been characteristic of most other religious faiths insofar as they were the monopoly religions in a given society needs little corroboration. Islam is one good example. In the case of several Asian religions, their mutual interaction and mutual debt and at times a creative fecundation helped them to maintain a measure of openness or inclusivism. At any rate, this characteristic of self-sufficiency in all religious faiths is something that is radically put into question by our situation of religious plurality, and consequently also the "closed shop" nature of all our religious reflection, whether by Christians or others.

Each of the major religions is unique and has gone through a different process of historical and cultural conditioning, and its fiduciary frameworks are different. This is obvious to anyone who knows the world religions. But, despite the uniqueness of each, there are indeed homologous or analogous ideas and concepts, or even overlapping religious experiences, between them. It is not Christians alone, or Muslims alone, who have wrestled with the meaning of God in their lives or the mysteries of the world. Others too, in their own way, have wrestled with similar questions.

If this is generally true, can Christian theological reflection be non-cognizant of the reflections of other faiths? For reasons mentioned above, the frontiers of Christian theology have traditionally been set within the perimeters of Christian dog-

mas, scriptures and the experiences of Christian community and even in the recent past it has seldom been felt that those perimeters could also lie within Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim spheres. But in the context of Asian plurality, can our search for a relevant theology continue on the traditional pattern of a closed particularity of our own faith and yet claim to be "universal" and meaningful to all?

Theology in dialogue in Asia therefore implies that a meaningful theological articulation must move away from this posture of total self-reference and explore a lively "theology of cross-reference." It is in the process of dialogue, or mutual engagement, that we may be able to articulate the meaning of our faith. Dialogue is here understood to be more than a bare methodology which is often employed in theological articulations. It is not a mere argumentation, debate or dispute. It is more of a commitment than a method of discussion. It is a commitment in the sense that the intent of dialogue is neither to silence the other nor to win an argument. This certainly does not imply a posture of indifference or an attitude of capitulation on our part with regard to Christian claims of truth or convictions. Dialogue is an encounter of committed people. It is a commitment to explore honestly one another's convictions and faith, to strive to expand one's self-understanding in the company of others in order to enrich one's own faith through an active encounter. It is also in that process that Christians have the opportunity to witness to or confess their faith and convictions while listening to the witness of others and thus enrich their own faith. Theology in dialogue is a commitment to do theology in an inclusive way.

That this process of dialogical engagement was the way in which Christian self-understanding evolved in its formative period is evident both in the scriptures and in the post-apostolic period. The testimony of St Paul, for example, was steeped through with such dialogues, both with Jews and with his Greco-Roman counterparts, as is attested to us in Acts 19:8-10 and Chapter 17. It is in these texts, among others, that the word dialogue (*dialogomai* or *dialogizomai* in the New Testament) is explicitly used. We need not go into exegetical details on the nature of dialogue in the New Testament except to note that the early Christian exposition of the mysteries of Christ, his titles and his work, owes a great deal to Christian dialogues and encounters with other

religious philosophies and worldviews outside the original Hebrew matrix of Christian faith.<4> Thus the development of "logos Christology" and "cosmic Christologies" (I. Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-20, to name only the familiar concepts) were evolved in the process of cross-reference. Similarly, that the contributions of early Christian apologists were indeed products of an ongoing dialogue and cross-reference is evident in Justin's dialogues with Trypho, Origen's dialogues with Celsus and in the writings of various church fathers in subsequent periods till the triumph of Christianity when, under the "Constantinian dispensation," it became the only recognized religion of the Roman Empire in 391 A.D., leading to the suppression of all other religious groups.

These biblical and historical precedents of theologizing in dialogue should allay any Christian fears of losing the distinct Christian identity. That later Christian articulations failed to follow these precedents and for historical reasons became culturally circumscribed need not be theologically inhibiting in the present context of Asia. A purely domestic Christian theology does indeed restrict the vision of Christian faith for the world and a theology of cross-reference is therefore the only theology in a pluralistic context. It is this perspective that will guide us as we explore some of the sub-themes of this symposium.

God and gods in dialogue

It is a characteristic of religious faiths that they know themselves from within and all others from without. It is natural therefore that they see their vision of ultimate reality, of God, in capital letters and as the only real one, and all others in lower-case, with "gods" seen as less real, as idols and products of human imagination. For an adherent of polytheism such distinctions between "God" and "gods" may make some sense, but for a monotheist for whom there is only one God, the existence of numerous other "gods" is nothing but idolatry.

From a monotheistic perspective the phrase "God" and "gods" in dialogue may conjure up a contest between "one" God against the "many," as was the case at the time of Eliza, a contest between Jahweh and the gods of Baal (I Kings 18). In many subtle ways such contests do take place in today's pluralistic contexts, although the divine intervention (in the story of Eliza) which re-

solved that contest may not be all that self-evident. For the Christian such a conflict is easily resolved, at least theologically, by making the "many" into mere idols. There is a good deal of biblical precedent for this (Isa 44:14-17; Jer. 16:19,20; Deut. 29:16,17). As a matter of fact it is characteristic of all Semitic faiths to maintain a tremendous aversion to idolatry. It is equally abhorrent to those faiths to deny the reality of God itself (as does Buddhism).<5>

The Jewish-Christian-Muslim notion of idolatry seldom agrees with the view of idol worship in such a tradition as Hinduism which has evolved an elaborate theory of *murthi* (idol) in its religious thought. As a spokesman of modern Hinduism Gandhi wrote, "No Hindu considers an image to be God."<6> They are symbols. He argued that the Hindu devotion goes beyond the images to the divine reality. Such anthropomorphic images are often necessary elements in any worship (as there are images of Jesus, Mary and the cross in Christian worship). Christians have often been appalled by the grotesque character of idols in other religions, but have they properly understood their symbolic character?

While Christians may dismiss other gods as idolatry, or may charitably consider them as necessary symbols, the problem still remains of how to account for the sense of the sacred or transcendent that most other world religions embody in various forms. If one really affirms that there is only one God, as do all monotheisms, do the experiences of the sacred in other faiths and their concepts of God or reality have any relation at all to that One God? Have we in a sense annexed God, taken him into our own custody, made ourselves sole agents, proprietors, of transcendence? It is clear that various faiths do articulate their sense of the transcendent in ways analogous to our concept of God - for example, the Confucianist Heaven, Hindu Brahman, philosophical view of Being, or even the Buddhist Nirvana. Christians firmly reject any equation of these concepts with the Father of Jesus Christ, but what and whether they contribute to our understanding of God is the task of theology in dialogue.

Lest our understanding of God's relation to the world of other witnesses of the sacred becomes purely theoretical or metaphysical, it may help to take note of an insight from Luther. He wrote,

A God is that to which we look for all good and where we resort for help in every time of need. To have a God is simply to trust and believe in one with our whole heart. The confidence and faith of the heart make both God and an idol. If your faith and confidence are right, then likewise your God is the true God. On the other hand if your confidence is false, then you have not the true God.<7>

Luther's assertion that the "confidence and the faith of the heart" will make both idols and the true God does carry an ethical and moral overtone. What does this right faith and confidence mean? As we know, Luther was less inclined to speculate about the mysteries of a "hidden God" (*deus absconditus*). His faith and confidence were based on a revealed God (*deus revelatus*) in Jesus Christ. This implied a God who is committed to humanity and its uplift, a God who participates in human suffering and history.

This insight is helpful in our understanding of the sacred in other faiths. Any manifestations of the divine which are not committed to human liberation and uplift can hardly enrich our self-understanding, although they could be intellectually stimulating. They may well turn out to be demonic if they do not express a commitment to human welfare and to liberation from oppression. This ethical commitment - a critical principle we mentioned at the beginning - should underpin all our discussions of God or of Ultimate Reality, especially in the Asian context where notions of God are known to enslave people in society.

Scripture and scriptures in dialogue

When we turn to dialogue between different religious scriptures, we deal with something more tangible. Here the question is simply one of what value we give to the scriptures of others. Answering this simple question requires us to be clear about the value we attach to any given religion and consequently to its scriptures.

For the majority of Asians, the non-Christian scriptures - Vedas, Upanishads, Pali canon, Lotus, Sutra, Tao Te Ching, Qur'an, Granth Sahib, etc. - have been sacred texts that have guided and nourished their life and hopes. They have mediated

the meaning of the sacred or the ultimate goal of life in their own idiom and vocabulary and in that sense represent the words of God. To deny this is tantamount to denying the activity of God in the histories of Asian people. What account do we therefore take in our theological articulation of such texts that claim to be "inspired"?

Christianity borrowed the Hebrew scriptures, made them its own and interpreted them in the light of its own claims. To some extent Islam did the same with Jewish and Christian scriptures. While Christians have affirmed theirs as the Word of God, they have rejected the Qur'an as being merely the words of Muhammad, although Islam claims that the Qur'an was literally dictated by God.⁸ We must remember that the authority of the Qur'an in Islam is equivalent to that of Jesus Christ in Christianity. Thus in the case of Islam, the question arises how the Qur'anic interpretation of the God of Abraham can help strengthen our understanding of Jesus as the Christ, without in any way undermining the divine transcendence that Islam wants to uphold at all costs. Does the Qur'an offer a necessary corrective to the Christian conception of God?

Dialogue between Christian scriptures and those of others does raise the question whether the wisdom of God is sealed exclusively within Christian scriptures. Did God leave all others in the dark for so long? Are other sacred texts, myths, and dreams in some way in their own idiom messianic? There have been Christians in Asia who have argued the need to supplant the Old Testament with Asian scriptures. It would be problematic to do so because, if the New Testament has any meaning at all, it is in the context of the Old Testament. But it may be worthwhile for Christians to explore whether other non-Christian scriptures could complement our own scriptures and if so, in what way?

Witnessing in dialogue

In all discussions about inter-religious dialogue, sensitive Christians always raise the question about Christian mission and witness. For some the very notion of dialogue is a compromise on Christian mission whereas, on the contrary, in the experience of many Christians engaged in dialogue, it has helped them to deepen their own faith and to witness to it more meaningfully. Awareness of plurality does have implications for Christian mission, but it is by no means a denial of the summons of the Gospel.

Recent Christian discussions have shown a growing understanding that mission is dialogical. This often means that witnessing to Christ implies some form of dialogue with others. But one must be clear that all forms of Christian witness are not dialogues. Often Christian witness tends to be a monologue and seldom listens to the testimony of others with sensitivity for their feelings. In such instances Christian mission assumes the guise of the predator. On the other hand, all authentic dialogue carries within itself a component of Christian witness. When such witness is lacking, dialogue becomes an inter-religious tea party!

There is then no basic antithesis between dialogue and Christian witness nor are they to be understood as mutually exclusive. Theological articulation in dialogue certainly has a "missiological" dimension in the sense that in dialogue we make our faith communicable and commendable to others. It is in the process of dialogue that a clear witness to one's own convictions is possible while remaining open to the witness that others may offer. How that mutual witness becomes effective in the pluralistic context is difficult to predict. It inevitably raises the question of "conversion" from one faith to the other. From a Christian standpoint, if others are persuaded by our witness, we have reason to rejoice but if they are not, our witness is still effective. Christians in Asia will need to come to grips with the fact that many in Asia who have heard the gospel have not been persuaded to become Christians for reasons of their own. How we respond to them and what the nature of our witness should be to those people are questions that will need our serious reflection. Furthermore, if conversion is not the central motive but rather a consequence of dialogue, we have to ask honestly what, in fact if not in intention, evangelism implies about the beliefs it addresses?

Dialogue in community

Insofar as dialogue is between people, it also implies dialogue between communities. Christian community is a part of human community and therefore Christians in dialogue with other communities need to reflect upon the nature of the community they mutually seek.<9> Dialogue is not simply about abstract theological thought but, fundamentally, it is about life. Faith and life cannot be separated. Therefore dialogue has consequences for our community life and our commitment to the value of human life itself. It is this moral commitment (to which we referred

earlier) which becomes a common criterion for evaluating the socio-ethical values of communities and the various meanings of salvation in religious faiths, including our own.

One can hardly overstress the importance of dialogue within and between communities in the Asian context. Dialogue alters relationships and helps communities to recognize their mutual dependence in spite of racial, cultural and religious differences. The situation of rapid socio-economic change in Asia has given birth to various kinds of new ideologies which influence relationships in communities and create conflicts. On the other hand, religions and ideologies have closely collaborated and play a role within societies. Given this situation, inter-religious dialogue in Asia cannot ignore the ideological dimensions in each religious worldview. Ideology is a programmatic worldview with a "vision" for the future and a "mission" to change the present to accord with that future. Most worldviews do function as ideologies in legitimizing societies by offering a vision for the future and a program of action. Religious vision for the future, on the other hand, is often "absolute" and expressed in such concepts as Kingdom of God, Nirvana, Moksha, etc.; they are eschatological and in that sense different from secular ideologies which are concerned about immediate socio-political change.

Inter-religious dialogues within communities or between communities must therefore look into their visions for the future and their commitment to human and socio-political transformation. It is in the struggles of human life and of communities and nations that faith responses and articulations are tested and made relevant. It is also in that process that the liberating as well as the enslaving, the divine and the demonic, aspects of faith and community life are disclosed.

Ministry and theological education in dialogue

What I have said so far should make it evident that our search for a relevant Asian theology in dialogue has practical consequences for our understanding of ministry and theological formation in seminaries. In our traditional understanding of ministry at the level of congregations or parishes, the function of the Christian minister or pastor is tied down to primarily caring for the Christian community. This is not to deny that Christian ministry is also concerned with its "outreach" programs,

whether evangelistic or social. But in situations of religious plurality in Asia, it is at the level of congregations that real interaction between religious faiths and communities takes place. Christian ministry in a multi-faith milieu therefore needs careful examination.

It raises questions about the obligations of the Christian minister toward non-Christian members of the community. Beyond the traditional evangelistic and social ministries, can the church develop a conscious ministry of dialogue? This is only possible when Christians develop a true understanding of the faith of their neighbors and puts the burden on theological education in order to equip students to develop a proper respect for others. The seminary curricula need to be examined in regard to their motivation for teaching courses on other religions. Are they missiological? Apologetic? Are the courses taught in a way which is conducive to good inter-faith relations or do they perpetuate traditional misconceptions and misinterpretations? At what level are they taught? What texts and resources are used in teaching other religions? Who teaches them? Christians or persons of those faiths? In what way are they taught - in theory or by actual exposure? How are such courses on other faiths related to courses on mission or evangelism?<10>

Theological education in Asia cannot play a significant role in developing theologies in dialogue unless it looks critically at its overdependence on Western theological models, methods and tools of reflection. We have often forgotten the contextual character of European theology and tend to treat it as the theology of the church, and consequently we relegate the Asian theological strivings to the periphery as elective or optional courses. Is it possible for us to develop an Asian hermeneutics of scripture that displays a pluralistic consciousness and relates to the historical and social realities of Asia? Can a relevant Asian theology be developed without understanding the roots of Asian culture to which Asian Christians belong and on which they superimpose their Christian beliefs?

Tradition in dialogue

Any Asian theology in dialogue would obviously need to be worked out in a Christian ecumenical context, and not just from the point of view of a particular theological or confessional tradition. But confessional traditions such as Lutheranism may con-

tribute some valuable insights to such discussions as well as benefit from them. As heirs of a distinct theological tradition, we as Lutherans carry with us certain presuppositions, principles and categories of thought. However, the meaning and adequacy of those presuppositions, as we have noted earlier, should be tested in the pluralistic context of today. In such a process our theological understandings are likely to change, grow and develop. When this happens Lutheran Christians in Asia will cease to be mere recipients of a tradition but become also creative contributors to the shaping of that tradition.

The encounter of Lutheranism with other faiths has indeed been minimal. Because of historical exigencies and despite his desire to understand the Judaism and Islam of his day, Luther ended up by unleashing voluminous invective against them.^{<11>} Thus both Luther and later Lutheranism followed a principle of *a priori* judgment of other faiths, as is clearly stated in the *Large Catechism*: "Outside Christianity, that is, where the Gospel is not, there is not forgiveness, and also there can be no holiness."^{<12>} Such a dictum creates an anomaly in Lutheran thinking, and indeed a wholesome shock, when we discover strong emphasis on divine grace in some religions without the knowledge of Christ (e.g. Jodo Shinshu of Japan or Bhakti traditions in India).

Lutheran tradition can, of course, explain such an anomaly by referring to our understanding of the law of creation or general revelation, or the work of God's left hand. The recognition of the experience of the divine in other faiths is possible in the Lutheran view, but if we follow the logic of this view, such experiences only lead to a "salvation by works," and are thus a clear denial of the experience of grace outside Christ. The problem is that Lutheran tradition uses the categories of law and gospel (which are quite helpful in our preaching and biblical hermeneutics) in such a way that in our definition all other faiths have to be treated under the law. We thus define others according to our categories and ignore their own self-definitions. How does this attitude accord with our Lutheran emphasis on a theology of the cross, on humility, on respecting others? Have we made our theological categories - which are tools to enhance our knowledge of God and his saving work in Jesus Christ - into evaluative principles of the convictions of others?

Lutheran tradition has always affirmed *finitum capax infiniti* (the finite is the bearer of the infinite). What does this prin-

ciple imply in the context of religious plurality? Does it suggest the possibility of discovering both law and gospel in other faiths? Can the "hidden God," who is a wrathful power according to Luther, be a mere law operator in other faiths and still be the God who operates through the dialectic of law and gospel in Christian faith? What does *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously a sinner and a saint) imply in the presence of other religions and their adherents? These are some questions which Lutherans in Asia, and elsewhere, need to wrestle with if they want to genuinely respond to pluralistic contexts.

Conclusions

In the preceding pages I have generally explored a perspective of doing theology in dialogue in the religious and cultural context of Asia. I have also raised some pertinent questions on the sub-themes for discussion. My treatment is somewhat brief and sketchy but, if we are to be sensitive to the challenges of the religio-cultural realities of Asia, we must wrestle with these and other questions and strive to reshape our mode of theological thinking. This may be somewhat disconcerting to some Christians but our commitment to the gospel impels us to face these questions in all honesty, in faith and in trust. All my efforts in this introductory paper, if it is at all clear, confirm my initial claim that our present theme is by far the most challenging and provocative theme chosen in the series of APATS symposia.

NOTES

- <1> See the reports and papers of the first three meetings in **APATS Luther Studies Symposia**, Geneva: LWF, Department of Church Cooperation, 1985.
- <2> Aloysius Pieris, s.j., "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in Virginia Febella and Sergio Torres (eds), **Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology**, New York: Orbis Books, 1983, pp.113-139.

- <3> This is a phrase that is developed by Kenneth Cragg in *The Christ and the Faiths*, London: SPCK, 1986. C.S. Song has used the term "theology of transposition" in *The Compassionate God*, London: SCM Press, 1982.
- <4> For a good discussion on N.T. materials related to inter-religious dialogue, see Kenneth Cracknell, *Towards a New Relationship*, London: Epworth Press, 1986. The literature on the Patristic period is too voluminous to cite. Two recent books are: Robert M. Grant, *Gods and the One God*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- <5> For a discussion of Christian views of God in relation to Buddhism, see John R. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Towards a Mutual Transformation of Buddhism and Christianity*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- <6> Cited from Kasuke Koyama's discussion on idolatry in *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai*, London: SCM Press, 1984, p. 41.
- <7> *Luther's Large Catechism*, exposition of First Commandment.
- <8> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Is Qur'an the Word of God" in his *Understanding Islam*, The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981. Also Avery Dulles, s.j., *Models of Revelation*, New York: Doubleday, 1983.
- <9> See the WCC Guidelines on Dialogue, Geneva: WCC, 1979. S.J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue*, Geneva: WCC, 1981, pp.15-34.
- <10> Samuel Amirtham and Wesley Ariarajah (eds), *Ministerial Formation in a Multi-Faith Milieu*, Geneva: WCC, 1986.
- <11> Lutherans have now clarified and even refuted Luther's polemics against Jews. *Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews*, Geneva: Department of Studies, LWF, 1984. Augsburg Confession, it should be noted, explicitly condemns "Muhammedans."
- <12> *Luther's Large Catechism*, Creed No. 56.

Christopher Duraisingh

"GOD" AND "GODS" IN DIALOGUE

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Religious traditions other than the Christian constitute a major part of the Asian-Christian existential as well as hermenutical context. Both questions posed and possibilities offered by extra-Christian peoples of Asia cannot but become the data of our fundamental theological reflections. A relevant Asian-Christian theology can be formulated only in conscious response to the richness of Asian religious heritages, not simply at a theoretical level, but also at the level of the concrete agonies and aspiration of the Asian masses, the majority of whom live by symbols of faith other than our own.

The symposium calls us to explore together a "theology of cross-reference," the only valid theology in a pluralistic context. The very first sub-theme, "God and gods in dialogue," dramatically calls attention to the very nature of theology and the problematic in the plural description of theology's primordial referent, God or its equivalent terms.

Before attempting to specifically address the issue of "God and gods in dialogue," it may be significant to set the scene of religious plurality in the Asian context. After such a brief description of the context, I will turn to a discussion of the relation between the terms God and gods in the dialogical context; I will then identify what I consider a valid process of dialectical interaction between various formulations of the referent referred to by the term God.

However, it may be important to indicate at the outset that the term God/gods is taken to have a double-layered reference in this presentation. In religious usage, the term refers both to the Ultimate Referent, faith in which (whom) is seen as the ground of confidence in life's meaning and worth, and hence the necessary condition of existence as human selves. Secondly, the term also refers to a symbolized referent, a referent available for and within human naming, symbolizing process. This distinction needs to be borne in mind and I shall try to both distinguish and relate these double-layered or doubly determined uses of the term God/gods throughout the paper.

1. Asian experience of religious plurality

I would like to suggest that religion in the world of today in general and in Asia in particular is experienced in three ways in the context of its pluralism.

First, religions in Asia form in "inter-connected single continuum." Comparative and sociological studies of religious pluralism indicate that religions of the world are no longer seen as isolated, mutually exclusive and static systems of belief; rather they seem to function as reciprocally interacting "reality-defining-processes" within a single continuum of the religious and cultural life of humans. Therefore, as W.C. Smith so aptly puts it,

The boundaries in time and space and conceptuality that we erect around given systems turn out to be postulates of doctrine rather than facts of history.<1>

This sense of inter-connectedness of religious traditions is nowhere else more acute than in Asia. Our religious heritages cannot be described apart from the socio-political, historical-cultural interrelatedness of the continent. This is so, at least with reference to the major religious traditions of Asia. Interpenetration of traditions is also the experience of the poor masses who are not isolated from each other as are theologians by the "postulates of doctrine."

Secondly, religions of the world are historical. This implies that one must be wary of isolating religions from the concrete historical contexts and speak of them in a vacuum. Authentic religions are not primarily systems of belief in this or that supernatural entity, person or process. It is rather that at the heart of every religion is the "conviction that the values one holds are grounded in the inherent structure of reality, that between the way one ought to live and the way things are there is an unbreakable inner connection."<2> In other words, every religion is a way, a *marga*, a way of seeing and being in the world in relation to what is taken as being the inherent structures of reality itself. In Asia, as well as elsewhere, religions function in structuring and directing the individual's self-understanding and behavior and ordering cultural values and social patterns. The double-layered term, God, is a primordial symbol in fulfilling such a historical symbol. For, as Clifford Geertz suggests, it is primordial symbols such as God and the corresponding system of other symbols that provide a basic inte-

gration and congruence between "a particular style of life and a specific (more often implicit) metaphysic ..."<3> It plays the decisive role of providing the necessary and comprehensive synthesis between "a people's ethos - the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and esthetic style and mood - and their worldview, the picture they have of the way things in sheer actualities are, their most comprehensive idea of order."<4> Therefore, W.C. Smith is right in exhorting us in Asia that:

Let no one imagine that the question of what is happening to Islam in Pakistan is anything other than the question of what is happening to man (sic) in Pakistan.... Let no one imagine that the question of cow in India is anything less than the question of how we men (sic) are to understand ourselves and our places in the universe. The Buddhist's involvement in politics in Vietnam is a political question but also a question of our relation to eternity.... If we do not see this, and cannot make our public see it, then whatever else we may be, we are not historians of religion.<5>

This radically historical character of religions also suggests in no uncertain term that the question of God/gods also comes to us as an eminently practical problem, a problem of human destiny and meaning in general and human community in particular. The term refers to centre or centres of value and meaning in terms of which humans draw significance and confidence for existence. God as the Ultimate Referent has then to do with that which is necessary for being, meaning and value in human existence, and the term God/gods, as the symbolized referent, refers to the symbolic forms in which such centre or centres of value and meaning are experienced.

Luther expressed this historical character of the referent God/gods as he attempted to answer the question: What does it mean to have a God, or what is God. His answer was:

Trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol.... For the two, faith and God, hold close together. Whatever then thy heart clings to ... and relies upon, that is properly thy God.<6>

This raises for us the very problem of the relation between God

and gods in dialogue. The plurality of formulations or symbols, or in fact the claim of plurality of centres of value themselves, are marks of the radical historical characteristics of religions.

Thirdly, religions of the world are processive and dynamic. As life is dynamic and ever renewing, so will human religiosity also be processive and religious consciousness ever expanding. In some sense, religious experience itself is a constant movement from the particular or the concrete to the universal. In describing religious phenomenon, Whitehead says, "Rational religion appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions, and to the elucidatory power of its concepts to all occasions. It arises from that which is special, but it extends to what is general." This inner dynamic of every religion must be taken note of in any discussion of "God/gods in dialogue." For religious truth claims and assertions of universality arise out of this dynamic or a movement from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the universal. Gordon Kaufman observes that religious symbol systems are built around "certain crucial events in our history through which the meaning of the rest of our experience has been illuminated and without which it would have been dark or very different." Both in Christian experience and in other religious traditions, there comes to be a process of fusion of particularity and universality, a move from a special occasion, insight, experience or encounter to a general claim. It is such a move that brings about the claim that the particular reality-defining and life-orienting symbols/system of symbols now can meaningfully interpret "larger tracts of history."

Besides, within the pan-Asian religious heritage, religions are seen as a "seeing," a very way of beholding reality. The term *darsana*, visioning, is foundational to describe the pan-Indian religious tradition, for example. The term itself has two meanings: active and passive. The active meaning refers to the active mode of religious awareness, whereas the passive meaning refers to that which is seen, the point of view. Together they constitute the phenomenon of religion: the visioning and the formulation of the vision. Within the Indian tradition, the formulation is plural; six distinct *darsanas* are accepted, though all vision the One.

Thus any discussion on God and gods in dialogue within the Asian context of religious pluralism will have to take seriously the interconnectedness, the radically historical nature, and the

processive and expanding nature of religious awareness as well as plurality of the formulations of vision within even a single tradition must be taken seriously. What are some of the general implications of these observations for the nature of a theology in dialogue, and to the understanding of the relation between God and gods?

First, it must be observed that plurality exists within each of the Asian religions. There is as much variety of formulation of the Ultimate Referent within Hinduism as in Christianity or Buddhism, for example. This implies that as believers we are no longer operating within clearly "reified" dogmatic theological stances divided by each individual tradition. The difference between theologians of Theravada and the Mahayana Buddhism is parallel to the Neo-orthodox and process theologians of the Western Judaeo-Christian traditions.

These features of the Asian context of religious plurality increasingly call for a breaking down of rigid barriers in doctrinal understanding and mutual appropriation of theological insights among different traditions. For, it is true that "however incipiently, the boundaries segregating off religious communities radically and finally from each other are beginning, just a little, to weaken or dissolve, so that being a Hindu and being a Buddhist, or being a Christian and not being a Christian, are not starkly alternatives as once they seemed?"^{<8>}

Such a situation also calls for a new kind of theological task which is undertaken in dialogue with equally committed believers of other Asian religious traditions. As Ewart Cousins stated as early as 1979 our situation demands "the forging of a Christian systematic theology that will encompass within its horizons the religious experience of mankind.... This is an unprecedented task. Never before in the history of Christianity has this challenge been raised."^{<9>}

What then would be the contours of such a theology? My chief concern in this paper is not as much with the material content of such a theology as with the formal and methodological questions that such a theology would entail.

2. God and gods in dialogue - relation between the terms

We referred earlier to the term, God, as the Ultimate Referent, that which points to an ultimate point of reference which func-

tions as the very ground and confidence of all else that is, as well as the ultimate limiting principle. It is referred to as the non-symbolic use of the term God or the "God beyond God" by some, Paul Tillich for example. It is that which the Indian seers insist as the indescribable except as "Neti, Neti," (not this, not this). Often in religious language this Ultimate Referent is spoken of as the Infinite, Invisible, Absolute, etc. Even the term, Void, functions for some in the same way as God functions for others. It is that greater than which nothing can ever be conceived. In this sense God is the great Relativizer.

Religious experience also affirms that God is the very ground of being and meaning of all that is. But the Ultimate is not accessible to humans unless it is mediated and experienced through particular, concrete and historical mediations. God is seen, revealed, heard, or experienced through historically and culturally conditioned symbols, gods.

In almost every religious tradition, believers do claim that experience of, or encounter with, a unique person, event in their history or disclosure of an insight has come to be the foundational factor in their defining reality and orienting their existence with meaning and value. It is also claimed that the foundational event or insight is not an outcome of human imagination but the very disclosure of the Ultimate within the conditions of human existence. This central event/insight is remembered and celebrated in rituals, interpreted in creeds and doctrines, and is seen as instrumental in developing ethical norms for the life of the community. In the process, not only the event in itself becomes an independent focus for the faithful, often in distinction from the Ultimate Referent; but also a cumulative tradition with ritual, conceptual and social symbols develops around the core vision. Thus the mediating person/vision or insight is so constitutive and decisive for the life of the community, it is given an exclusivist and universal normativeness. The symbolized referent, the "available God," is so foundational, the Ultimate Referent that it originally mediated is bracketed out, if not found to be irrelevant. But thanks to the reality of plural truth claims in the context of plurality of religions, it has opened a new way of rediscovering the Ultimate, Transcendent Referent, the "God always beyond" (*Deus semper major*) to that the symbolized mediating referents, gods, are relativized, however formative and decisive they may be for the diverse communities of faith.

The key question in a dialogical theology, therefore, is how can

we relate the Ultimate and mediating referents without, on the one hand, minimizing the decisive and constitutive role that they play in the formation and humanization of particular religious communities and, on the other hand, without minimizing in any way the radical relativizing power of the Ultimate? What sort of relationship between God and gods would safeguard, on the one hand, the legitimacy of particular claims of formative decisiveness to particular historical and symbolized mediations and yet, on the other hand, open up new discoveries of the Ultimate Referent, God, through a dialogical process.

What model of relation between diverse truth claims for particular symbolizations of the "available God" could offer to God, the Ultimate Referent, the richness of the Asian poly-symbolic religious ethos and awareness? These are some of the questions to which we need to address ourselves in this symposium.

Furthermore, the question of human sinfulness, hubris, and self-centeredness, that elevates for itself relative centres of values as ultimate centres of value needs to be faced and hence the need to develop a set of criteria in dealing with claims for multiple centres of value, gods. The scope of this paper, however, will not allow us to address the crucial issues.

All of us are familiar with diverse ways in which Christians have understood the relation between the truth claims in different religions. Several books within the past decade have amply studied and set forth these relationships. Probably Paul Knitter's *No Other Name* (1985) is the most comprehensive presentation of the problem to date.

It may be useful to remind ourselves that some perceptions of the relation are extreme cases. For example, on the one extreme, there are those who claim that only the Christian way of symbolizing the Ultimate with reference to Jesus as the self-disclosure of God is true and universally normative and that therefore all other symbols of the Ultimate are false and even idolatrous. On the other extreme, there are those who claim that all human perceptions are partial and relative and equally valid. A fuller view of the Ultimate is possible, it is claimed, by putting together these diverse perceptions, as in the story of the four blind men seeking to understand an elephant by putting together their partial sense of the referent. While describing each of these types of relation and critiquing would be useful, what I seek to do is to offer a limited identification of elements of an authentic relation between the plural affirmations of the "available God" within human existence.

- i. The central claim of all major religions that the Ultimate is "always beyond" any available symbolization and thus relativizes all, should lead us to a radical theo-centrism. In the Indian context, for example, one can observe that Christian theologians as they are more and more involved in dialogue have moved away from an ecclesio-centrism through Christo-centrism to a radical theo-centric affirmation. Jesus is the Christ precisely because through him we come to God, the Ultimate. A radical theo-centrism also implies that the fullness of the transcendent reality, God, is universal and hence available, by necessity, only through a dialogical experience.
- ii. At the same time, since the Ultimate Referent is available only through particular historical mediations, it is crucially important to affirm the centrality of such person, event or disclosure. Without the latter, the former will not simply be "available" for humans. But no such symbolized referent could claim ultimacy. As Samartha contends, for example, "All religions, including Christianity, have an "interim" character.... At depth the essential feature of all religious life is its pilgrim nature.... Finality should not be claimed to the oases on the way."<10>
- iii. But relativization of religious symbols, gods, does not mean that there is no room for profound commitment. In fact, if the experience or encounter with a person, event or insight is so foundational and orienting and fulfilling life for individuals and the community, then believers need to not only claim decisiveness of the symbol for the community, they will also offer the core-symbol/vision as universally important and valid for others who are outside. Witnessing and confessing to the universal importance is a necessary part of encountering the symbolized referent. But claiming something as universally significant and valid is not the same as claiming for it exclusive universal normativeness. Herein is the need to distinguish carefully between claims of universal significance of a core-vision and universal normativeness. The latter will effectively preclude any dialogue between those who hold diverse symbolizations of the Ultimate.
- iv. Affirmation of the Ultimate Referent, God, and culturally given mediating symbols does not warrant the claim that all symbolizations of God, "gods," are equally valid. Hence one cannot deny that a particular symbol can be more valid than some others. This is important within Christian tradition.

It would mean that we deny a "Christo-monism" which claims exclusive and universal normativeness to Jesus over all other symbolized referents of the term God, but that we would insist on the distinct importance that it has for the Christian faith-community and on the universal relevance or importance of the Christ event to understand the Ultimate Referent of the term God. Jesus will be confessed as the moment or instance from which a new way of God relating to humans and into which we can be initiated. But at the same time, he is not claimed as the "norm above all norms." Nor does this position need to affirm that, somehow, the Christ reality has been present in all religions, at least anonymously. While Jesus is confessed as "wholly of God," he is not said to be the "whole of God."

- v. In brief, in a dialogical discussion on God and gods there is neither room for "understanding as extention of one particularity." To Christians such a position would imply conquering all other lords/gods by God in Jesus Christ. In practical terms in the past, it meant the extention of the church and the extinction of other religious communities. If God alone is the ultimate reference of being and source of meaning, then one does not have to defend one's understanding of God in a particular way over against all other understanding; rather one can be freed to jointly explore with others of different faiths the "ultimacy of God who holds all things and all people in his embrace."
- vi. In the Indian context, theologians in their search for the ultimacy of God through dialogical exploration of the particular symbols have come to affirm the primacy and centrality of the Spirit. R. Panikkar is an example. Samartha too calls for an open dialogical theology. He says:

What we need today is a theology that is not less but more true to God by being generous and open, a theology not less but more loving toward the neighbor ... a theology that refuses to be impregnable, but which, in the spirit of Christ, is both ready and willing to be vulnerable.<11>
- vii. If my distinction between the Ultimate Referent of the term God and available referent or symbolized referents of the term God/gods as well as my description of the process of religious symbolization as one in which a particular moment

of historical experience comes to assume a controlling "interpretive role" for the believers is acceptable, then the most useful and adequate way of defining symbolized referent in any religion, god(s), is paradigmatic. Particular historical symbols or symbolic referents, gods, are paradigmatic of the Ultimate Referent, God. In other words, the most adequate way of understanding the symbolic process of the ultimate in every religious tradition, i.e. in its affirmation of God and gods, is that the latter (gods) are as powerful symbol of significant experience or nexus of experiences (within a historically conditioned religious tradition) which function as paradigm providing integrative meaning for the totality of experience. I use the term paradigm to mean a decisive pattern of meaning consisting of primary and secondary symbols that are centred and unified around a primary symbol. Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha are such central or primary symbols around which Christians and Buddhists respectively find the paradigmatic power and significance for their life-orientation and fulfilment. These core events, experiences or symbols hold before a believer most directly and most persuasively a structure of personal/communal existence as authentic possibility for him/her. A paradigm comes to be when some specific historical event, insight or experience provokes an interpretation whose symbolic value and power become decisive for orienting lives and providing archetypal meaning for persons of that faith-community. The more a paradigm is able to fuse particular historical experience and symbolic meaning, the more decisive its paradigmatic significance becomes. My rather lengthy and formal discussion on paradigm is because of my conviction that the category of paradigm is that which could describe the relation between God and gods in religious pluralism, between the Ultimate Reference of the term God and available referents and symbols.

The decisiveness of a paradigm or core-symbol depends on the extent to which it is perceived to fulfil the following functions:

- a) to fuse the horizon of the universal and the particular; that is, a particular event or experience comes to tune "human actions to an envisaged cosmic order and (to) project images of cosmic order into the plane of human experience;
- b) "to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in" (humans);

c) "to clothe the stories, images and concepts that express the paradigm 'with such an aura of factuality' that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

In any inter-religious dialogue or relation that forms the ethos for "a theology of cross-reference," these core-symbols or symbols of available referent to the term God in each of the religions in dialogue function as paradigms of the ultimate to its believers. Thus "gods" are paradigmatic expressions of the ultimate in given religious traditions. The inter-relation between paradigms, their possible fusion or mutation and growth or their mutual enrichment for believers in each tradition would form the dynamics of the relation between the "gods," the symbolized referent, in each tradition.

d) When such an interaction between core-symbols take place, it is possible that in a given context some paradigm may be experienced as more valid than another by believers who belong to two or more traditions now in dialogue. A distinction and valuing in terms of degree of validity, relevance and comprehensiveness is legitimate. One paradigm and not the other among a few of different traditions now in dialogue can be said to be more or less comprehensive or valid; but the criterion is solely within the experience of dialogue. It cannot be brought by any one from outside. It is intrinsic to the dialogical dynamics and cannot be applied by an "external" observer. However, in this sense the criterion of validity or relevance of one paradigm is neither objective nor entirely subjective, i.e. entirely within the subjective experience of one or more subjects; rather, it is "inter-subjective," available to the collective experience of all those involved in the dialogical process.

e) Since the claim to greater paradigmatic relevance or validity or comprehensiveness of one core symbolic referent is entirely within the dialogical context, and has only a "functional" validity, it does not warrant one to claim for it any final or universal normativeness above other traditions.

f) However, as religions interact and as corporate critical self-awareness of participants in dialogue is enhanced and therewith the depth of the totality of experience, there may come a time when one may completely switch over to a new paradigm and thus experience "conversion."

g) But normally, within an authentic dialogical context, as "gods," the core symbols and their symbolized referents are

shared, each participant or each group may be led to reconceive the super-structure, the secondary stories or secondary symbols, while the infra-structure, the centre of the paradigmatic core, will have an enduring pattern, though enriched immensely.

h) It needs to be noted that within the encounter of paradigms, core symbols within a dialogical context, truth is not primarily a quality of propositions or doctrinal formulations but rather praxiological, belonging to the realm of orientation and transformation of life.

Such a fusion or growth, mutation, reconception or enrichment in symbols of Christian tradition have been testified time and time again by theologians who are actively engaged in dialogue with persons of other faiths. The following is a powerful testimony to such a process in Mark Suder Rao, an Indian Christian thinker whose dialogical style of life was the context of his theological life and reflections. Almost at the end of his life he writes:

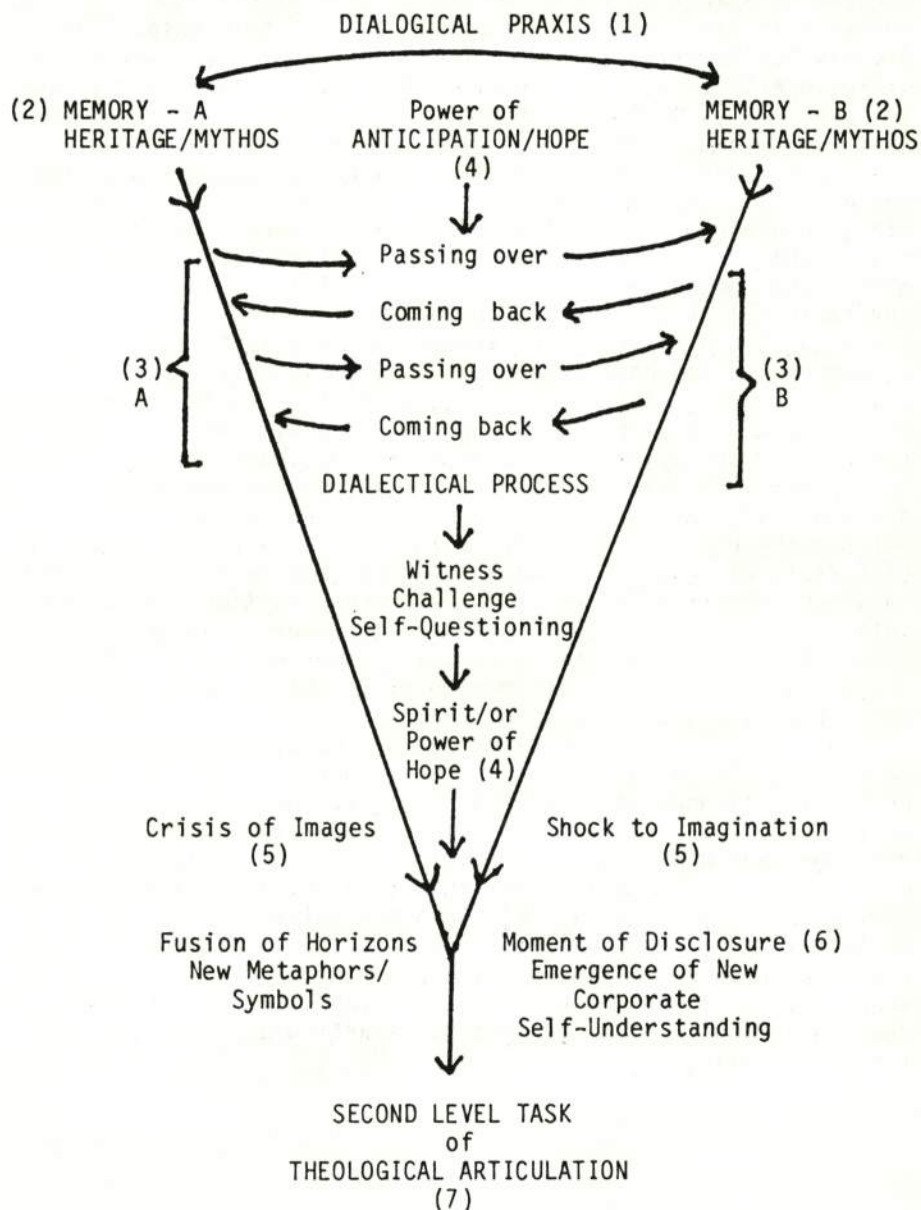
The idea of confluence of two streams of thought and faith, *sangam* of East and West, in the heart of the Indian Christians had then taken firm grasp of my thought and life.... In the mental constituents of an Indian Christian, somehow both the living ideas of the West and of the East converged, each side retaining its distinction and yet conjoined in a new configuration.<13>

In the above testimony, theologizing is not contextualizing; nor is it translating Western theology into Asian terms and concepts. It is in this sense not "indigenizing" something that comes from outside Asia. But it is rather giving birth to something new in the engagement of dialogue. Several other concrete illustrations for such a process of theologizing in and through dialogue could be identified. The relation between God and the world in the Judaeo-Christian traditions in terms of stark personalistic models of potter's relation to earth and the Indian imaging of the relation in the more unitive symbol of "hair arising out of body" or "one becoming many" could be yet another example of how "God and gods" are imaged and drawn into a dynamic new understanding in terms of the relation between a self and its body in Indian-Christian thought within a dialogical context.

3. God and gods in dialogue - the process of imaging

It would be useful to identify rather briefly how such a dynamic process of symbol formation in the context of dialogue. The diagram in the following paragraph might be of some help. The process begins with dialogical praxis, concrete involvement in dialogue with persons in the context of day to day living, facing problems of suffering, hopes and aspirations, ((1) numbers in the diagram); soon one becomes conscious of the "memory," antecedent symbols, myths, that each side brings to the dialogical context. This heritage is owned and confessed and articulated in dialogue with all sincerity (2). Herein begins a process of what John S. Dunne has called "passing over" (into the other) and coming back. This is a dialectical process of back and forth (3) which involves appreciation of the other, asking newer questions to one's own tradition. A principle of suspicion operates and challenges some of the inherited symbols and interpretations. The dialectic is kept alive by the push and the power of "anticipation," hope of the new; some call this the work of the Spirit of dialogue, the Ultimate Common; I like the term the "Middle Third" in the midst of the two partners in dialogue (4). As the dialectic leads on, and as the distance between the partners is bridged, there comes about an experience of "crisis of images," a shock to one's imagination, as it were, in which inherited images from one's own tradition are called into question, for widening and opening up or at times for rupture. A sense of pain and uncertainty does occur, almost a convulsion in the power of imaging at the birth pangs of new images (5). It is at this point that the "disclosure" of the new or the birth of a fused horizon out of the two in dialogue comes to be. W.C. Smith calls this the emergence of a new corporate critical self-understanding (6). This is the point of birth of unified and new metaphors and images out of the hitherto disparate horizons of religious traditions. The new metaphors come with such a paradigmatic power that they set forth a whole new horizon of understanding. This is not a naive and superficial assimilation of some insights from both the traditions that we are talking about. Rather, it is an interior dialogical phenomenon. Out of these metaphors, as a second-level task, the theologian constructs more systematic articulation in various forms of writing (7).

Theology in dialogue between religious traditions:
Dynamics of the process



This theological process can be specifically illustrated in terms of given symbols of faith about "God and gods" in dialogue. It is a creative growth. As Panikkar describes it:

Such a growth means continuity and development, but it also means transformation and revolution. Growth does not exclude mutation; on the contrary, there are moments even in the biological realm when only a real mutation can account for further life.... The future is not just the repetition of the past.... Growth does not deny a process of death and resurrection; quite the contrary. If growth is to be genuine and not merely cancer, it implies a negative as well as a positive metabolism, death as well as new life...<14>.

I take it that the APATS Symposium calls for such a radical process of the birth of a theology in dialogue throughout the churches of Christ in Asia. To continue in Panikkar's words, we need to ask ourselves:

Who are we to stifle the growing seed, to choke humble and personal buds, to quench the smoking wick?

But I should hasten to point out that this is not a subjective process involving individuals and experts. It is a process that involves our corporate critical self-understanding. It is a process that includes our communities of faith. In fact, as Knitter suggests, "the new model of religious truth is more consonant with a theory of the "continuing creation" of all religions. Each religion certainly originates in a powerful revelatory event or events. But the identity of each religion is not given in such events; rather, the identity of a religion develops through its ability, grounded in the originating events, to grow through relationships with similar ongoing events. Religion, like all creation, is evolving, in constant flux; and the evolution takes place through ever new relationships."<15>

4. God and gods in dialogue: Asian contribution

I am aware that the presentation has been more formal than material in its content and thrust. One is also aware that so much can be said in terms of the material content as a contribution to the theology in dialogue in Asia. In the form of outlining a

few items, let me identify briefly some of the salient features of a theology in dialogue in Asia.

1. Asian religions singularly emphasize the inseparable relation between God and the world, the infinite and the finite. This unitive and unifying vision of all of reality needs to unfold in mutual challenge, correction and influence of religions in dialogue, in order that its ambiguous nature be pruned and reformulated for the wholeness of humans and cosmos.

Within such an understanding of God-world relation, Christians in Asia can challenge Western Christian attempts to sever the inherent relation between the finite and the infinite. But at the same time, we need to affirm also that the infinite makes sense and is "divine" only in relation to finitude. Cannot Jesus of Nazareth then be envisioned as the dramatic manifestation of God's unreserved commitment to the finitude of life and historical time, even to the extent of taking risk?

- ii. The two poles of Asian theological axis are its overwhelming poverty and multifaceted religiosity. If, as Aloysius Pieris has clearly demonstrated, poverty and religiosity seem to coalesce in order to procreate the Asian character, then what does it mean for our theological task in dialogue, particularly in the light of both the ambiguous nature of religion in maintaining the status quo and the liberational potentials of these religions? If any theology in dialogue is possible, as I have identified above, only when we share with our Asian people our common memory, which is one of suffering, of praxis in the present which is liberational and common hope/anticipation which is toward fuller life and emancipation, then what would be the shape of our core symbols regarding God and gods?
- iii. Asian religions are primarily soteriological. But this does not mean that they do not image the world as creation and salvation. They are not subsequent acts in linear time. Is it not the case that in much of Western thought salvation is often imaged as almost an after thought and described in contra-distinction from creation? Hence the dichotomy between spirit and matter, human and nature, nature and history, male and female, etc. Our formulations of God and gods need to take this Asian heritage seriously as well.

One can identify many more possible features of "God and gods in dialogue."

But it is not easy because, as someone put it, faith can be theologized only from the inside of religious heritages. It calls for a new kind of Asian theology. But more radically, "this new theology calls for a new kind of theologian with a new type of consciousness - a multi-dimensional, cross-cultural consciousness."

Asian people will be grateful if this APATS Symposium could play the role of a midwife in bringing into being theologians of poly-symbolic consciousness in the religiously and culturally plural Asian matrix.

NOTES

- <1> W.C. Smith, "Interpreting Religious Interrelations: An Historian's View of Christ and Muslim" in: *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 6/5 (summer 76-77), p.516.
- <2> C. Geertz, "From Sine Qua Non to Cultural Symbol Systems" in: W.H. Capps ed., *Ways of Understanding Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1972, p.185.
- <3> C. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Harper, 1973, p.89.
- <4> *ibid.*
- <5> W.C. Smith, "Traditional Religions and Modern Cultures," in: *Proceedings of XIth International Congress of the International Association of the History of Religions*, Vol.I, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968, p.65.
- <6> H.R. Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*, New York: Harper Torchbook, 1970, p.119.
- <7> Gordon D. Kaufman, *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960, p.107.
- <8> W.C. Smith, *Toward a World Theology*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981, pp.90-91.
- <9> Cited in Paul Knitter, *No Other Name*, London: SCM, 1985, p.225.

- <10> S.J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue*, Geneva: WCC, 1981, p.153.
- <11> Cited by W. Ariarajah in C.D. Jathanna ed., *Dialogue in Community*, Mangalore: KTRI, 1982, p.244.
- <12> C. Geertz, *op.cit.*, pp.90ff. I am indebted to Geertz for my understanding of the role of formative symbols in cultural and religious traditions.
- <13> "Christa Darsana: A Christian Vision of Reality," in: *Religion and Society*, XIV (September, 1967), p.6.
- <14> *Intra-Religious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, 1978, p.72.
- <15> Paul Knitter, *op.cit.*, p.219.
- <16> W.C. Smith, *op.cit.*, p.146; italics mine for emphasis.

Naozumi Eto

"GOD" AND "GODS" IN DIALOGUE: A RESPONSE

I must, first of all, express my deep gratitude to Christopher Duraisingh for this thorough explication of the methodology of "theology in dialogue." He has shown us a bold way of doing theology of religions which is worth being called systematic. It has become clear that we Christian theologians and ministers need to open ourselves to the people of other faiths and engage in dialogue with sincerity and humility.

When we start to reflect on dialogue the question arises whether there are other ways to reach religious truth and salvation besides Christianity, just as there are several ways to climb to the top of Mount Fuji. It is not a question of whether the Christian faith is the way to salvation, but rather whether this way is the only one or whether there are other ways. Our symposium aims to look at this concern from a more theological perspective.

Duraisingh has concentrated on establishing a "theology of crossreference" and particularly its methodology. I am going to respond by following the development of his paper.

I would like first to accept his double-layered usage of the term God/gods, i.e. the Ultimate Referent and a symbolized referent. This distinction is necessary to avoid making the ultimate reality a finite being or making the finite the ultimate. As Paul Tillich uses the concept of "God beyond God," the ultimate reality cannot be confined to any image of God which human beings have in mind.

One of Duraisingh's presuppositions is to develop a "theology of cross-reference" in "inter-connectedness of religions in Asia in a single continuum." He holds this idea on the basis of comparative and sociological studies of religious pluralism. It seems to me to be a matter of debate, because I wonder to what extent this is the concrete case already today (although it may become true in the future). The time has come for religions to engage in dialogue; major religions have stood side by side for many years. I can accept his second and third statements in regard to the radically historical nature of religions of the world and their progressive or processive nature. If we look at the de-

velopment of the idea of God in Israel, there was a time when YHWA was regarded as one, albeit the most powerful, among many gods, but later on the monotheistic view came to be firmly established. Jesus was the first to call God "Father." The history of theology eloquently proves the progressive or processive nature of religious awareness.

Now we must move to Duraisingh's second section on the relation between the terms Ultimate Referent and symbolized referent. Two concepts help us to maintain that there is one Ultimate Referent called God and many gods according to the understanding of each religion: Martin Luther's idea that all human beings know that there is a God, and Paul Althaus' concept of *Uroffenbarung*. According to Paul Tillich, no sphere of life can exist without some form of relation to the ultimate concern. He also maintains that every religion is based upon revelation and that the spiritual presence is in every religion.

However, it is not so easy to accept that the personal character of God in the Bible and the impersonal one in Buddhism or Confucianism represent two sides of one reality. The same is true in the case of the transcendental view of the biblical God vis-à-vis non-transcendental Japanese gods called *kami* and again in the case of the animistic nature of religions in the South and the shamanistic nature in the North. Can we say unreservedly that each of these understandings is a reflections of one ultimate reality?

Duraisingh asserts that God is the great relativizer and the ultimate limiting principle as well as the very ground and confidence of all else that is. Karl Barth maintains that Christianity, together with all other religions, is to be relativized by the absoluteness of Revelation. So does Tillich. How can we understand these theologians' view of relativization of religions by revelation without referring to any phenomenological fact of religious plurality?

I think Duraisingh is right in saying that the ultimate is not accessible to humans unless it is mediated and experienced through particular, concrete, and historical mediations. It is natural that, because of its constitutiveness and decisiveness for the life of the community, the mediating person/vision or insight is given an exclusivist and universal normativeness.

In this regard Duraisingh's demand for the "radical theocentrism" is to be accepted. My question here is whether this

assertion is the same as John Hick's "Copernican revolution in the theology of religions" in which Jesus' deity, his being Son of God, is questioned but is regarded as a poetic, symbolic or mythological expression. Can it be "unitarian" or "trinitarian" theo- centrism? I would like to know the position given to Jesus Christ in Duraisingh's "theo- centrism." He also places high importance on the work of the spirit of dialogue. But does he incorporate Christ and the spirit in "theo- centrism"?

The idea of "paradigm" is unique and effective if we are to solve the difficult question of how we can relate the ultimate and mediating referents without, on the one hand, minimizing the decisive and constitutive role that they play in the formation and humanization of particular religious communities and, on the other hand, without minimizing in any way the radical relativizing power of the ultimate. We may claim the universal significance and validity of the symbolized referent, but cannot claim it exclusively as universal normativeness.

In another section, Duraisingh identifies three features as anticipated results of dialogue. In regard to what he says about the relation between creation and salvation, how does he see Karl Barth's view on creation as external grounding for salvation and salvation as internal grounding for creation, which are inseparably related to each other? I question how he can draw out of this a dichotomy between spirit and matter, human and nature, nature and history, or male and female.

I also note that in his system there is no distinction between general revelation and salvific revelation. He seems to say that all revelations are salvific as well as general. But, then, what is the theological intention behind the traditional distinction between the two? We have held that salvation comes to us *extra nos*, from outside. Should we give up this notion and say that all religions have salvific revelation?

Although I have raised several questions, I regard Duraisingh's enterprise to be a very well thought-out new proposal for Christian theologies which have developed in the Western tradition.

Olaf Schumann

"SCRIPTURE" AND "SCRIPTURES" IN DIALOGUE

Some general remarks on sacred scriptures and their dynamic genesis

There is no religion which is not based by its adherents on some kind of authoritative text. In the context of our discussions it is quite unimportant whether these texts were transmitted in a written form or orally by priests or other religious authorities who taught them to their pupils. Sacred texts which later became sacred scriptures like the Vedas were even considered to be inspired; the Buddhist Tripitaka, or the myths of "cosmic" (tribal) religions had their original periods of oral tradition until they were later fixed in scripture. To a certain extent this is even true for the Qur'an, although its parts were written down immediately after the Prophet of Islam had proclaimed them. Although in the history of religions the Qur'an may be considered as the prototype of a written sacred scripture (kitab), we know from early discussions among Muslims that the authority of those who remembered Qur'anic passages in their mind (huffaz) was by no means inferior to the authority of those who collected written fragments of this book.

The existence of sacred scriptures is something quite usual in the world of religions. But at the same time we have to keep in mind that, at least in the initial stage of their existence, they were considered to be living speech and only later became more or less unalterable texts. This does not mean that in the eyes of the respective adherents these "oral texts" might have been altered on purpose. For most of them, such an alteration would have been a blasphemy. But for the historian of religions it is obvious that, after all, they have been subject to modification and alterations. These were caused by interactions with new (religious) experiences or the exchange or debate of thoughts with adherents of other religions. This means that sacred scriptures have also had a phase of dynamic development, of struggle with competing conceptions or amendment with supplementary materials, to become finally canonized and put into a textual form which could no longer be altered. Thus in fact there is no sacred scripture which does not testify in itself to the "dialogue," or the wrestling with contemporary religious and/or philosophical currents. As classical examples we may

point to the story of the creation in Genesis 1 as an addition to the older story of the creation in Genesis 2:4ff. We can follow the "post-history" (*Nachgeschichte*) of this text, as it had been worked on by the scribes, in the Greek translation of the Septuaginta in which, while "translating" the Hebrew passage of the creation and nature of the human being, anthropological terms were used which reflect early stages of neo-Platonic philosophy (*pneuma/pnoe*, *psyche*, *sarx*). They became the scriptural basis for the Jewish philosopher Philo who formed them into a system and influenced later philosophical developments in the Hellenistic world. For St Paul also these terms became basic anthropological expressions, the Septuaginta itself the basis for the later Latin translation of the "Old Testament" in the Vulgata, considered as authentic biblical text by the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that the Reformation referred back to the Hebrew text is one of the main reasons for the differences between Catholic and Protestant theological anthropology.

As another example we may point to the stories of the prophets as retold in the Qur'an. Comparing the account of the "Life of the Messiah" in Sura Maryam (19) with the parallel account in Sura Al Imran (3), we quickly realize how theological reflection has worked. The older account in S. Maryam is still void of doctrinal controversy with the Christians but the younger (Medinan) account already reflects the Christological issue. Stories about other prophets show the same picture of doctrinal progress based on Muhammad's religious experience and growing theological insights.

Let me end this part with two short examples from quite other religious situations. The myths in cosmic (tribal) religions, even those related to the cults usually referred to as the most conservative, were subject to change already in "historic" times, as can be seen in the Batak myths concerning the High God Mula Jadi naBolon, who, in some of his descending manifestations, is named with Hindu terms like Bhatara Guru and thus shows conceptual influence of Hinduism. The same holds true for Dayak myths and Alatalah, which is the Arabic Allahu ta'ala and points to an encounter with Islam.

Finally, the people of Papua New Guinea can witness to the fact that even today myths can be adapted to new experiences and thus undergo a process of dynamic renewal: for this they need only observe the fate of the Kilibob and Mandub myth against the background of the cargo-cults during the last 100 years.

Scriptural dynamics versus dogmatism

The purpose of these remarks has been to show that, at least for the historian of religions, sacred scriptures or texts (including oral ones) have by no means remained unaltered through the ages, but that all of them have experienced a time of dynamic encounter with contemporary ideas before they finally became canonized and, more or less, literally fixed. It is my conviction that this insight is not only important for historians of religions but even more so for theologians, because it can prevent them from holding the erroneous conception that any religion - even the one adhered to by themselves - has grown in history like a plant in the Pure Land, without outside influence which might have had an impact on the growth of this religion. This erroneous conception, if it exists, holds even true for the sacred scriptures which are usually considered as the basis and source of the respective "theology" and which are believed to have been inspired.

Anyhow, a theologian is (not only) a historian, but has also to consider the accepted theological or conceptional understanding of the scriptures in each religion being studied. And before coming to an own conclusion a theologian must study these conceptional understandings one by one, so as not to fall prey to the kind of grave misunderstandings which would disqualify him/her in the eyes of other believers as a serious scholar or a respectable partner in dialogue.

A theologian will find a general tendency to deny that such scriptures have been subject to internal theological developments and outside influences. They are believed to contain eternal truths which by way of definition cannot be changed. Moreover, it is felt they should be conserved, as indeed many of them have been. The scrutiny of the scribes has prevented the expansion of scriptural interpretations in relation to actual problems faced by the believers.

But to study the concept of the position and role of sacred scriptures in a certain religion will also have its rewards. The student of a religion will thus experience that at least one door opens widely and allows an adequate understanding of this religion from its own point of view.

The position of scriptures and its implications for dialogue: two examples.

Sacred scriptures are usually considered to be inspired by a supranatural power, be it called "God" or whatever according to the respective "theology," or to have been inherited from the primal ancestors as guidelines to cosmic harmony.

Buddhism

However, in Buddhism we very quickly find that, if we look deeper into the matter, this religion knows nothing about the conception of inspired scriptures and would moreover deny it categorically. The simple reason for this is the fact that, according to Buddhist teaching, there exists nothing supranatural which might be the source of such inspiration. This is the first insight into Buddhist philosophy when we study the position of sacred scriptures in this religion. And this insight is basic for Buddhism as a whole. The second insight shows that there is even no basic need for traditions or for guardians of traditions who would inherit the knowledge of the ancestors and deliver them carefully to the coming generations. In other words, the sacred scriptures do not contain eternal truths which must be preserved carefully. They are useful as guidance but do not contain an absolute must of knowledge for the devout believer and they cannot replace one's own experience of truth.

We may therefore conclude that in Buddhism everything which is necessary for what we may call in our terminology "salvation" does not necessarily need to be derived from an outside source, be it "revelation" or "tradition," or even scripture. And if this is correct, we come to the third insight: that everyone bears in him- or herself the potentialities to free himself/herself and reach the goal of Nirvana. To obtain it the devout have to free themselves especially from any kind of authority. And if the scriptures, or even the Buddha himself, were to become such an authority, they would become an obstacle and prevent the devout from reaching their goal. It was one of the basic aims of original Buddhism to free itself from the authority of the Vedas and the tyranny of the Brahmins who kept their knowledge and thus prevented people from finding the salvatory wisdom.

However, it is now well known that Buddhism also knows sacred scriptures: for Theravada-Buddhism they are compiled in the Pali-Canon and contain the Tripitaka (three baskets) and for

Mahayana-Buddhism, in addition to the Tripitaka, there are a number of Sutras that also claim to originate from the time of the Buddha but have been mainly composed in the last centuries before and the first century after Christ. These are, without any doubt, religiously meaningful insofar as they describe experiences or methods which help the devout to understand the nature of the liberation. But they are useless for them as long as they themselves have not attained the same experience, and it is moreover questionable whether the experience and methods of others are helpful for oneself. The Buddha, according to legendary accounts, after having experienced *bodhi* (awakening), asked himself whether it would be useful to search for his friends who had left him earlier, and explain to them at least the basic four truths of life, the last one of which is - typically - the description of a method (the path of eight steps). In fact it was compassion which finally drove him to them and, having briefly spoken of these truths, he took much more time to describe those things that prevent a person from attaining happiness. Therefore, for Buddhists not only the teaching Buddha is important but also the silent smiling one who expresses the happiness of being awakened.

In one of the ancient collections of the speeches of the Buddha a story is told: a man named Malungkyaputta complained to the Buddha that he had refused to teach him certain truths. The Buddha answered with a story of a man who had been hurt by a poisoned arrow. When the doctor arrived, the wounded man said that he would not agree to have the poisoned arrow taken out of his body until he knew who had hit him, from which caste the aggressor originated, what he looked like, where he lived, what kind of weapon he had used, etc. If the doctor had agreed to give all this information, the man would have died long before the doctor could answer. The same would be true if someone were to wait to start the devotional life until he/she had heard everything about the world - whether it was eternal or temporal, finite or infinite, whether life and body were the same or different, whether the awakened one would exist after death or not, etc. By that time the listener would be dead and everything in vain.<1>

This story shows that silence, too, plays an important part in Buddhist self-understanding because it is also related to *anatta*, liberation from the "own self," which means a total renouncement of every objective. The teaching of Buddha, and the scriptures handed down later as containing his speeches, are no more than an invitation to this liberation; they should not

be used as a barrier which prevents one from jumping into a personal experience of this liberation. They are useful in the way a ferry boat is useful for crossing a river, but no one would consider carrying the boat on their back after reaching the other side.

This shows us that the meaning of the scriptures is more negative: the scriptures point to obstacles on the way to awakening and give hints how these may be removed. This aim can be reached by simply narrating the experiences of others, whereas doctrinal discourses (especially in classical Buddhism, but again with vehemence in later developments like Ch'an or Zen-Buddhism) prefer negative definitions in order to help the mind free itself from positivist thinking.

Bearing this aim in mind, we may now understand why in certain developments in Buddhism the contents of the scriptures have been reduced to very brief expressions, where the power of many words is accumulated in short formulas or mantras. Mantra is something powerful, its meaning cannot be argued about or even refused. A mantra points to a truth, and realizes this truth at the same time. One of the most famous mantras is the "Om mani padme hum", addressed to the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. The sound "Om," which has no meaning in itself, is to help the devout feel the presence of the Bodhisattva, and at the same time realize his freeing compassion. There is a comparable method in the koan (kung-an) in Zen-Buddhism: "Listen to the sound of one hand" (not two hands!) or "the gate in the closed wall" or "the vehement words of the preacher who did not open his mouth." These are very meaningful sentences. If you experience their truth in yourself you are very close to the break-through.

What does this mean for dialogue? First of all it means that the Christian partner in dialogue with a Buddhist has to learn that discussions on doctrinal matters laid down in the Buddhist scriptures may be important and helpful but do not imply the experience of liberation which is the utmost goal.

This liberation is the liberation from the "self," the disappearance in Nirvana. I think that by now we all understand that this does not imply a nihilistic worldview. It implies the experience that every limitation set by the limited self and its distinguishing conscience has been surmounted; it is possible to experience a radical oneness with everything which had formerly been defined, limited, and thus separated from the other.

If this is the meaning of anatta-doctrine, then there is a strong invitation for dialogue with Christians and their understanding of conquering the old ego which girds itself in a state of alienation from God and fellow human beings and taking on the new ego in Christ (Gal. 2:20) which leads into a new koinonia, with humanity, the creation, and God.

I shall not elaborate this point further but would just mention here that the Buddhist teachings as laid down, or developed out of, the sacred scriptures do permit possibilities of dialogue (even dialogue on doctrines) but they also open up other possibilities beyond the scope of Scriptures.

Islam

Dialogue with Islam confronts the non-Muslim with quite other theological problems; they again can be traced by studying the understanding of Muslims towards their sacred scripture, the Qur'an. Let me start by stating that, at least up to the present, it is quite fruitless to argue with Muslims about the historicity of the Qur'an and its origin in the religious experience and reflection of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Even if we point out that there are certain similar (sometimes even identical) stories of the prophets in the apocryphal traditions and books of the Jews and Christians which reappear in the Qur'an, and suggest that this could prove Muhammads's dependence on earlier accounts, such arguments would produce no impression on the part of the Muslims. They would merely reply that, if you read the Qur'an carefully, you would know that the truths which were revealed to Muhammad have been revealed also to other prophets before him. Thus, if there are similarities between Jewish and Christian traditions and the Qur'an, thanks be to God that they, the Jews and Christians, did not forget them.

To discuss with Muslims the position of the Qur'an on the basis of a historical-critical method is not (yet) possible. We therefore have to accept that for Muslims the Qur'an is the Word of God, communicated verbally to the Islamic prophet Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel as an intermediary. There have been some discussions in the history of Islamic theology whether the Word of God, i.e. the original, heavenly Qur'an, had been created by God or whether it had been part of the Divine Essence since eternity. A created "Word of God," even if it existed before the creation of the world, would be of a "temporary" character and therefore more open to actualizing interpretation. By common agreement, however, accepted at least by the Sunnite Muslims

since the 10th Christian century, the Word of God is believed to be eternal, and therefore the margin for interpreting the Qur'an according to present needs is narrow.

The Qur'an that is now in the hands of Muslims is not identical in its character to the Divine Word. It is more like the image of it, having been "translated" or transformed into human language and therefore clothed in a temporal garment. As the Divine Word is a living word, it should be read, and the more beautiful the voice and the articulation, the greater the overwhelming and attractive power of it. The vigor of the Arabic of the Qur'an, although it is a human language, has often been considered as proof that its origin could not be human but rather the reflection of divine majesty. Although in later periods, after the Hijra, its language became more argumentative, the impression of the older parts of this book has left its imprint on the feelings of Muslims towards it. Let me just give you an example which, according to Muslim tradition, represents the oldest "revelation" Muhammad had received:

Iqra! Bismi rabbika 'lladhi khalaq
 khalaga l-insana min 'alaq
 Iqra! wa-rabbuka l-akram
 a'lama l-insana bi-l-qalam
 a'lama l-insana ma lam ya'lam.

Even without actually understanding its meaning, one can feel the almost magic power which these verses exude.

But now, having pointed to the Muslim understanding of the Qur'an, we have to ask: what does looking into the role of scriptures in dialogue mean for our purpose? The first conclusion must be that for a Muslim the scripture of every religion which claims to have a divine source is judged in the light of the Qur'an. This does not mean that there must be verbal identity. Because the "Word" had been presented through the prophets in their respective languages so that it might be understood by the people, there may be considerable variations with respect to themes and ways of representation. But no doctrinal or conceptual contradiction can be accepted.

The "book" of Musa (Moses) which is the Taurat (Torah), or the "book" of Isa (Jesus) which is the Injil (Evangelion), differ according to the respective situations and level of religious insight of the people to whom they were originally addressed. But their basic contents must be the same and must be identical

with the Qur'an because it is impossible that there should be contradiction in the common, divine "original" of these books.

The fact that there are differences and contradictions between the Gospel and the Torah (Old Testament) has caused the Muslims to be convinced that these books have been altered - not by the older prophets! - but by their later adherents and that therefore divine truth and human error is mixed up in them (the theory of tahrif).

This theory of tahrif could encourage us to reconsider our own attitude towards our scripture, i.e. the Bible, and particularly the New Testament. If we also name it "the Word of God," we should be well aware of what we mean by that term. Christian fundamentalists who take the Bible as being verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit, will run into a vicious circle in their argument with the Muslims on the question which one of the two scriptures is inspired. History has shown that such disputes lead to nothing.

However, I think that the discussion with the Muslims can help us to gain deeper insights into the nature of the Bible and the meaning of its being "inspired." If we look at one of the loci classici in Christian doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible, we find that 2 Tim. 3:16 states: "Every scripture, inspired by God (theopneustos), is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

This passage makes clear the importance but also the limits of a scripture inspired by the spirit of God; it helps people to understand their situation, but it does not save them. But it is precisely salvation which Christian theology has related since its beginning to the Word of God and its work among human beings. Christians should therefore be eager not to confuse their conceptions of the Word of God incarnate in Christ which enables salvation, and their understanding of the scripture(s) if they are also called the "Word of God." The Word of God and scripture do not stand on the same level.

This means that, for a Christian in a dialogical situation, it is not necessary to verbally compare sayings of the Bible with sayings of the Qur'an because the Inspiring Spirit is not dependent on certain human expressions, even if they have become scripture. After all, they remain also human language, and Lu-

theran theologians are aware that even the most holy and famous disciples of Christ are still *simul justus et peccator*, and therefore their testimony contains both divine guidance and human weakness. An interpreter of the Gospel therefore not only finds him/herself accused by the Law when he/she reads the text of the Bible but is also conquered by the renewing power of the *viva vox evangelii* (living voice of the Gospel).

In fact I did not intend to focus too much on this point. But everyone who has had "dialogues" with Muslims knows how crucial this matter of *tahrif* is. If we do not break through this discussion and make it clear that, in Christian understanding, the Gospel, or New Testament, is not an inspired book in the way the Muslims believe it to be, we will never reach the real matter in Christian-Muslim dialogue, namely the question of salvation, and the role of the "Word of God" in it. Christians should ask themselves whether it is really necessary to call the Bible the "Word of God," thus adding quite superfluous confusion and misunderstanding for the Muslims - and leaving the question open under which conditions the talk about the Bible as the "Word of God" is theologically legitimate.

Hendrik Kraemer once suggested that in a comparative approach the Qur'an should be compared with Jesus Christ, whereas the prophet (Muhammad) and the Bible have a comparable position since both testify and mediate the "Word of God" to the believers. Kraemer's statement was very important in its time and put an end to confusion about the real points of comparison. But, however intriguing it may be, it has to be reconsidered, and I think Paul Rajashekar in his paper felt this when he compared the "authority" of Christ and the Qur'an, but not their character. Because, after all, for Muslims the Qur'an has not in itself a salvatory dynamis. It is guidance, *huda*, from God to the believers, it is the "divider" (*al-furqan*) between truth and falsehood, etc. But the Qur'an is not "working" salvation. This all believers have to strive for on their own by obeying the guidance and principles of moral and religious behavior laid down in the Qur'an and explained and worked out in systems of *shari'a* (literally: way, road to pursue), in addition to a minimum of doctrine.

Thus, the "Word of God" in Islam helps believers to find the way to salvation but, as in Buddhism, they have to walk it on their own. According to Islamic anthropological theory, the human being is able to work for his/her salvation, to reach the goal, and therefore does not need to be saved by someone else. But

devout Muslim believers have always been aware of their practical deficiencies and know that in spite of their efforts they are still dependent on God's compassion (rahma) on the Day of Judgment.

From this we can conclude that for Muslims the practical role of the Qur'an is in fact quite comparable to the role of the Scripture for a Christian; here again we may point to 2 Tim. 3:16, and even to Buddhism.

At the same time, however, it becomes clear that the Christian conception of the "Word of God" is quite different from the Islamic Kalam Allah. Both contain God's intentions for creation, the internal rules for it, and its final aim.^{<2>} But as Christian theology reflects on sin as a substantial disturbance in creation, it also relates the creative Word of God to the salvation of creation, and in this it differs from the Islamic understanding. As a practical consequence, in Christian-Muslim dialogue the understanding of the "Word of God" should not be confined to scriptural questions only but should include its dynamic dimensions, which would mean clarification of the respective concepts of both sides.

For a Christian theologian or believer who understands the term of the "Word of God" in the light of the "Incarnate Word of God", this clarification would open the way for a sincere study of the Qur'an, in the light of the limits which 2 Tim. 3:16 sets for every "God inspired scripture," thus differentiating it from the "Word of God."

Consequences for a dialogical interpretation of the Qur'an

As we come to the end of this paper, let us see whether there is also some "wisdom of God sealed" in the Qur'an, to use Paul Rajashekar's wording. The first thing that strikes us is the fact that the Qur'an appeared approximately 600 years after Christ, that it speaks in a very vigorous manner about the First Commandment, but also that, in the light of this emphasis, the Christians are accused of having disrupted it by worshipping Christ (and his mother) and attributing to them divine attributions, whereas the Qur'an emphasizes the mere humanity of Christ, the "Servant of God." We should now ask ourselves why this should have happened after 600 years of Christian preaching and witness, and 300 years after Christian rise to political power.

I presume that now many Christians consider it important to look deeper into this matter. My aim is not to open a discussion on the developments of the Christological debates in the Early Church, although to restudy them would be of extreme importance. I wish simply to say that obviously something went wrong. And this was visible to everyone who remembered the despised and crucified one, who had been made by now the *pantokrator* in glory and power, justifying the practice of Christian rule and power by the heirs of the Roman Caesars.

Jesus was seen not as the one who emptied himself and became a servant but as the one restored to divine glory. It was the image of the exalted Jesus which inspired his followers and disciples, thus turning the paraenesis of Phil. 2:5-11 upside down.

In my view it is not so important to study what Muhammad might have known of Christian teachings and what came to him in a distorted way. A look into the motivations of the Qur'anic anti-Christological polemics makes it clear that the Christians were not criticized only on the basis of matters of doctrine but because their wrong doctrine had led them to a wrong way of life: following the "Son of God" they like to consider themselves also "Sons of God," and accordingly their attitude is one of *takabbur*, or arrogance.

Is it not possible that this severe Qur'anic criticism of Christians after 600 years of Christian presence might be a sign of God's wisdom expressed in the Qur'an, calling the Christians to return to the backbone of their faith, i.e. into the discipleship of the Incarnate Word of God and not of a Word of God which in fact (though perhaps not in doctrine) covers and hides the face of the crucified man. All Christological expressions of the New Testament make it clear that God's glory is present and works in the man Jesus of Nazareth and that this is to be understood in a dialectical way, not in a temporal succession. Jesus' contemporaries could not grasp this dialectics and that is why they crucified the powerless Messiah. The church on its part was in difficulties and developed a temporal sequence in which it saw itself living in the time of the victorious Spirit rather than the time of the historical incarnation. The results of this heresy are nameless tortured and crucified men and women in the name of a Christ who cannot be identified with the Christ of the Gospels.<3> Is it a mere historical accident that the Qur'anic religion, which reminded the Christians of the human Messiah, became the most powerful opponent of a Christianity which tried to forget that fact and strove for power and glory?

This leads me to a concluding remark on this passage. After having taken seriously the Qur'anic reminder, the Christian may also now have the right to ask the Muslim partner why Islam has not taken seriously the last consequence, the ultimate fate of the human Messiah, i.e. his death caused by human beings? Usually Su. 4,157 is interpreted as a refutation of the crucifixion (la qattaluhī wa-la sallabuhu lakin subbiha lahum). In the context of this verse, some atrocities by "the Jews" are rebuked, among them their attempt to crucify Christ. But God did not allow them to accomplish their aims. Both Muslim and Christian interpreters have often pointed to - their! - conviction that God could not let one of his servants be killed by ungodly people. This conviction has no basis in the Qur'an which repeatedly reports prophets being killed. Thus, in taking the Qur'anic text seriously, the Christian partner in dialogue should also feel free to ask for interpretations of the Qur'an which in the traditional history of tafsir (interpretation) have not yet appeared, but which are not contrary to the Qur'anic literal meanings. Kenneth Cragg is someone who from time to time makes use of this freedom. It should, of course, be practiced carefully, and I think it is obvious enough that it should not be done without a Muslim partner - who need not accept every interpretation in the same way that the Christian is selective in considering biblical interpretations by non-Christians.

To show more concretely what I have in mind we might even go a step further and ask whether the wording of the Qur'an really implies a refutation of the crucifixion. I want to hint at this question by pointing to two scriptural instances, one Qur'anic, one biblical:

1. In the battle of Badr, after it was nearly lost by the Muslims, a few fighters took up arms again and turned the course of the events into a victory for the Muslims. However, in the Qur'anic record of this event it is said: not you killed the unbelievers, but I, Allah, killed them (Su. 8,17). If we use this as an interpretative aid provided by the scripture itself, may we not ask if perhaps Su. 4,157 implies that it was not the Jews who killed the Messiah but rather that God fulfilled His plan in the crucifixion. It "seemed" to the Jews that they killed the Messiah, but the real actor was God who used them.

2. Especially in the Gospel of St. John, but also elsewhere, the crucifixion is seen as the exaltation of Christ. The Qur'an, too, mentions in V, 158 that the Messiah was "exalted" by God. Could this not also be used as an interpretative aid for Su. 4,157?

I have mentioned already that such interpretations would naturally contradict the traditional understanding of these Qur'anic verses. But if the scripture itself does not preclude possibilities of understandings other than the traditional ones, and if scripture is moreover even open to other interpretations, then there should be no obstacles for partners in dialogue to restudy the verses. They might then reach a deeper and wider understanding than that provided by tradition.<4>

Conclusions

It has been the purpose of this paper to show that canonical scriptures, whatever their character or authority, can be the subject of dialogue. In fact, they already represent in themselves a kind of dialogue. Moreover, by studying them, Christians - as well as any other believers - will be challenged to reexamine certain developments in their own religion and even to correct distortions which have occurred in the course of history. In the case of the Qur'anic example, it may even help to rediscover forgotten dimensions - maybe not forgotten in explanations of church dogmatics but forgotten in the practical life of the church and its adherents. Alone to achieve this dialogue is necessary. Why should not a theology which practices such dialogue (and indeed develops in dialogue with other faiths and faces the challenges of other religious systems offering salvation and redemption) be healthier and more truthful than one that is monological?

Notes

This paper had been prepared under some pressure of time, without the necessary access to some source materials. The careful reader will soon detect that some of the thoughts expressed in it would need more careful reflection or explanation. However, when reading over the manuscript again to prepare it for publication, I thought it better to leave it as it is, except in a few instances where I reformulated some ideas for the sake of better understanding. This paper was prepared as a stimulus for discussion, and not necessarily to give answers to questions that have arisen or problems that have been touched. I hope it will serve this purpose after publication also, in spite of its fragmentary character. Words from non-European languages have been transcribed without diacritical signs.

<1> Cf. Hans Waldenfels, *Faszination des Buddhismus*. Mainz: 1982, pp. 74ff.

- <2> These are, very briefly expressed, the main functions related to the Logos as reflected in St. John's Gospel and elsewhere in contemporary philosophy. The roots of this conception go back to the Old Testament and were developed in Jewish theology especially in relation to God's wisdom (Chokma).
- <3> In the context of this paper I only mention this Christological issue. In a later publication I will try to show in more detail how a Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christ as the "Servant of God" might help Christians to reconsider a relevant (and still biblical!) Christology. (Der Messias als Knecht Gottes, to be published in Evangelische Kommentare)
- <4> For further discussions on this point cf. Anton Wessels, *De Koran verstaan*. Kampen: 1986, pp. 172 ff.

Paul Varo Martinson

SCRIPTURE AND SCRIPTURES IN DIALOGUE: A RESPONSE

A. General comments

First, I would like to briefly summarize what I see to be the flow of the paper. It falls into three parts. First, Schumann discusses in a general way the role of scripture in any religion. He gives special attention to the historical-critical issue of the dynamic development of scriptures within history. This raises an implicit tension, which he notes, between historical relativism and religious authority. As an historian of religions he likes the former; as a theologian he will have to deal with the latter. Second, he puts forward in some detail the understanding of scripture within the Buddhist and Muslim traditions. The very different understandings of scripture that they bring forward lead to two very different challenges for dialogue. On the part of the Buddhist, scripture is a means to a goal and as means does not participate integrally in the goal. The view of scripture is instrumental. It is like a raft that one uses and having used to cross to the other shore is then simply left to drift on down the stream. The "wordiness" of scriptures can, indeed, be more an obstacle than a help, unless this wordiness is radically negated. Unless scriptures become a means to break through to liberation, they are worse than useless. This is the radical relativizing of scriptures in the service of a more profound goal - Nirvana. The Muslim brings a contrasting view. Here scripture, the Qur'an, is the very Word of God. It is the temporalized project or translation of the eternal Word of God. It is not the only temporalized Word of God, but being the only fully available temporalized Word it is the final norm and criterion for all other possible words. Here we are challenged by a radical extra-nos understanding of scripture which has an eternal value, and as such is integral to the very experience of the meaning of Islam (committal to God). Third, having described these two instances of scriptural understanding, he explores in fuller detail some aspects of the Muslim scripture and how its content might engage the Christian in dialogue.

Second, Schumann is concerned about both formal and material considerations in the discussion about scriptures. In the formal discussion, dealing with the nature and function of scriptures of any kind, he speaks from the safe distance of the ob-

jective historian of religions. In the material discussion, where he deals with scriptural content, he becomes the theologian, indeed even an impassioned preacher almost, pressing home to us the need for dialogue.

B. Towards a further theological formulation

In this part of the response I do not wish to identify particular issues within the paper and make pro or con statements on them. Rather, as I read the paper I found myself shifting into somewhat of a systematic mode, trying to put together how I understood the role of scriptures in dialogue theologically. Schumann's more historical mode of presentation kindled this quest for setting forth some basic principles. I will respond in this section, then, by putting forward a series of theses, more or less. In them I pick up many of the things that Schumann has already said and combine them with some thoughts of my own.

Three differing uses of scriptures have been put forward: the Buddhist, the Muslim and the Christian. How do we see them in dialogue?

1. It is not the understanding of scripture that determines a particular religion, but the inner texture of the religion that determines the understanding of scripture. Scriptures are a secondary feature (cf. Schumann's discussion of 2. Tim. 3:16-17). The primary feature is the conception of final reality itself, of God or Nirvana. Clearly, the Buddhist and Muslim views of scripture reflect or embody particular prior assumptions.

2. Nonetheless, scriptures do attain specific functions within the variety of religions. If Buddhist scriptures tend to function instrumentally, in Islam they tend to function unconditionally.

3. In both cases the scriptures have an authority function. To understand this function, however, it is not helpful to view scriptures in isolation from the larger religious context. Normally we take scriptures to be discursive. However, in both the Buddhist and Muslim cases we are shown important non-discursive functions. In Buddhism, the discursive function of scriptures is radically negated, so that its whole meaning can be concentrated in a non-discursive sound, a mantra; or even in an action, a slap in the face. Similarly, the lilt, rhyme, flow and pulse of rich Arabic sounds are even more truly of divine origin

than the discursive meanings themselves. This suggests to me that scriptures may be only one of several means of defining the context within which faith or enlightenment is enabled. The scriptures, but also other things such as ritual, sound, action, community, as well as the myth, context the person or religious adherent. To some religions scriptures have a higher profile in contexting the individual, in other religions ritual, dance, apprenticeship may have a higher profile. In Zen, for instance, which celebrates getting rid of words, the meditation pattern, the sitting position and its relation to movement, the site itself and the community, and especially the master-disciple relationship and the master's "certification" of progress, narrow the context within which enlightenment can be expected to take place no less than the Muslim discursive doctrine of divine inspiration narrows the context for the occurrence of Muslim faith. Similarly, the Christian understanding of Jesus as the Christ who lived from God and for neighbor narrows the context within which Christian faith can be expected to arise.

4. If scriptures are secondary, what are the primary assumptions? The primary assumption in the Buddhist conception of reality that finally determines the role of scripture is the experience-doctrine of non-self. There is no core inhering in any feature of reality. To extinguish our instinctive grasp onto an elusive core is the experience of enlightenment, the experience of reality in its totality. The primary feature in the Muslim conception of reality is the unity of God who is the merciful creator and master of the universe. Identification with the unitary will of God in Islam (committal to God's will) is the heart of religion.

5. What is the primary feature in the Christian conception of reality that finally determines our understanding and use of scripture? I risk myself as I submit a proposal. It has two simultaneous aspects:

a) when Christians say "God" they identify themselves as monotheists not far different from the Muslim who says "there is no God";

b) when, however, Christians characterize that reality called "God" they use the language of differentiation: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. God in God reality is dynamic relatedness. "God is Spirit," "God is love," scripture says.

The consequence for a Christian understanding of Christian

scriptures is to make it neither like the Muslim nor the Buddhist understandings. For the Christian, scripture is a witness, indeed for us the primary and irreplaceable witness, to particular features of God's dynamic relatedness to the world, and the Jesus event is named "the Christ" because it is the definitive feature of this relatedness, a relatedness that bore the consequences that only vulnerable love will bear.

6. How, then, do we see scripture in dialogue? Let me suggest a model of three scriptural gaps. Two of these gaps occur within the Judaeo-Christian time line. The first gap is that between the Jesus event and the Hebrew scriptures. In what sense is the Jesus event a continuation or a disruption of the prior history of Israel with God? The second is the gap, evident within the New Testament, between the Jesus event and the church. To what degree is the church a continuation of or contradiction to the Jesus event? I would submit that much of Christian theology is an attempt to deal with these two gaps internal to the Christian scriptures. How we address these gaps is decisive as to how we address the third gap.

The third gap is that between the Judaeo-Christian scriptures and all other scriptures. It is a horizontal gap between differing religious traditions rather than internal to a single tradition. Schumann's language of dynamic development is important here. The Judaeo-Christian scriptures have been shaped as other scriptures (traditions) have moved across earlier gaps into the substance of the Judaeo-Christian stream, being appropriated in ways fitting to the Judaeo-Christian perception of God. Once scriptures are fixed, the gap becomes vast and wide. How we deal with this gap, a gap we cannot nor ought not simply wish away, will be decisive for the future of the Christian faith, and perhaps for the faith of some others as well. In the simplest terms I would say that we bring the Christian understanding of God (of which one characterization was given above) into that gap where scripture addresses scripture within our hearing, with the assumption that the dynamic-relatedness we call God has not finished its work of being creatively and lovingly present with others and with us. Schumann has illustrated how this might function for us in his concrete discussion of the revelatory relevance of the Qur'an for the Christian.

7. Schumann's discussion of the Buddhist understanding of scripture raises fundamental questions for our understanding of symbol, metaphor, language. If God is dynamic-relatedness, a reality we have experienced in and through Jesus Christ, then an in-

strumental view of symbol, metaphor and language does not suffice. Language belongs to our reality as beings in relationship and, indeed, is constitutive of our being human at all. We become human, or at least more truly human, in so far as we address one another. That the Word became flesh suggests that "language" has also become constitutive of what it is to be God.

8. If it is true that the concreteness of relationship (God to world in Jesus, us to one another) "contexts" the Christian, and thus also Christian scripture (which, nevertheless, is already the first witness for us to this contexting), then it is also the case that all our use and interpretation of scripture is normed by this concreteness. As Schumann suggests, the dialectic of the "crucified man" who was also raised summons the Christian to interpret scripture and scriptures in the midst of concrete historical relationships, past and present.

José B. Fuliga

WITNESSING IN DIALOGUE

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Dialogue on deep-rooted religious convictions has become incapable and imperative. The boundaries separating peoples on the basis of ethnic and religious alignments have been reduced geographically and technologically. Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims are no longer confined to their traditional geographical territories and can be found in the very heartland of erstwhile Christendom. Fulfilling the Great Commission no longer necessitates going to a far away mission field. The "pagans" have come within walking distance. Representatives of various peoples everywhere are within our very own communities, especially in urban areas. Many of them are there not as transients and guest workers but as permanent members of our nations. Christians today live in a community of many different religions and races. It is a world with a pluralistic faith and to live in it in isolation has become impossible.

The ancient and non-Christian religions, especially of Asia, have become catholic in their constituencies. It is not rare to see an Anglo-Saxon Buddhist, Hindu or Moslem. The traditional Christian belief that the non-Christian religions would eventually disappear has proved to be a myth and in fact these religions have become militant and mission-minded and are growing, in spite of the intense effort of Christian missions to convert the world.

In many cases unintended witnessing in dialogue has taken place between members of the Christian faith and of other religions which has both enriched and weakened the nature of these faiths. Syncretism and the presence in Christianity of religious cults flavored with Eastern spirituality are enough proof of this assertion.

The task of witnessing in dialogue becomes imperative when we realize that after over four centuries of Christian missionary work "the Christians are numerically and qualitatively an insignificant minority: a mere 2% of the Asian masses, half of whom are in the Philippines." <1> Dialogue can bring much potential benefit for all faiths and peoples. If it had taken place earlier in history, much religious fanaticism and prejudice could have been prevented; the crusades, the jihad and the Holocaust might not have taken place. In a world fast moving towards its

eschaton, the challenge of witnessing in dialogue becomes urgent.

This paper will deal only with the ancient religions, particularly those in Asia. Witnessing in dialogue is not an interaction of varying beliefs within the same household of faith. It involves a broader form of ecumenism - an intercourse of people belonging to different households of faith, with serious differences, and yet holding a common belief in "God" (or something equivalent to that) and the community of human beings. That commonality provides the possibility for witnessing in dialogue.

Witnessing in dialogue means climbing quite a lofty peak because there are fewer matters in common among the different religions. In comparison, an ecumenical undertaking (in the strict and traditional sense of interpretation) would be like climbing a mole hill. There is a considerable vacuum of knowledge among the adherents of one religion in respect of other religions. This is particularly true of Christians who, in the security of their faith, have refused to learn about other religions (except for those who have ventured to become scholars). Moreover, whatever little knowledge the believers of one religion may have about other religions is, in many instances, distorted. Therefore this task of dialogue is a painful and difficult undertaking - a kind of martyria, a martyrdom.

What witnessing in dialogue should not be

If the participants in dialogue have no genuine faith conviction, it would only be an exercise in futility. Such a praxis would smooth over differences but could produce no serious and meaningful fruits. It could become a competition in ambiguous explications and compromise and could not be described as a Christian endeavor. Witnessing in dialogue must be attempted by those who are committed to their faiths. Faith must meet faith. "Dialogue does not exclude witness. In fact, where people have no convictions to share, there can be no real dialogue." <2> We seek dialogue because we have a conviction to share and because we are impelled to a commitment to be "ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us" (I Peter 3:15). A dialogue without witness, and particularly without witness to Christ, ceases to be a Christian endeavor. But the witness to the scandal and foolishness of the Good News should not become obnoxious. While we cannot take a stance of neutrality, we dare not make the Gospel into bad news.

Witnessing in dialogue is not a confrontational encounter. It is a communication between people eager to love and listen to each other. We must listen seriously to the faith of the others in order not to demean religious convictions. Moreover, "winning them over" should not be the primary goal. If someone is converted, the glory belongs to God. But at the same time witnessing in dialogue does not imply "demonstrating" the undertaking. Both parties in the dialogue must recognize that there is always a missionary purpose in such a venture, but that this missionary purpose is mutual.

Our task is not to show up the faults and weaknesses of other faiths with the eventual aim of annihilating that faith and supplanting it with our own faith. Such an effort will lead us to focus on differences. However, when dialogues concentrate only on similarities and avoid deep-seated differences, witness is shortchanged.

Witnessing in dialogue becomes repugnant when one participant sets the agenda for discussion, since what is a priority concern for the one may not be so for the other. There must be mutual agreement on the agenda. For example, the main concern for Muslims in the southern Philippines today are land and political autonomy and not religious questions.

Some people would do more harm than good in their witness. One must be properly equipped for such an endeavor. Participants in this interaction of faiths must not impose their conviction on others. While we are instruments of God to convince others, let faith become a conviction created by God rather than enforced upon people. In this process of dialogue we also have something to learn from others. G.R. Singh writes:

If we assume that we have the full knowledge of the Gospel and that we have nothing to learn from the other, then there can be no true dialogue, and what we call dialogue becomes a dishonest technique.<3>

Dialogue is teaching and learning at the same time. It cannot therefore be a monologue. In carrying on their witness, Christians often write the script, so to speak, and limit the participation of non-Christians. This attitude is the product of a view that non-Christians are godless non-believers. For this reason very little effort has been made to understand the faith of others. There was, and still is, a sense of triumphalism which makes the Christian participant not only impose his/her

views and thought categories and use the kind of language heavily weighted with traditions alien and unintelligible to the dialogue partner. This attitude makes non-Christians associate the Christian faith with the arrogance of colonial powers. Political alliance often hinders fruitful dialogue and witness. One who advocates the political views of Israel would be unlikely to receive a hearing from a Muslim.

Witnessing need not demand that those converted to the Christian faith adopt the religious and cultural trappings of the carriers of the Gospel. The important and valuable cultural and religious heritage of other religions need not be abandoned if they can be appropriated for the benefit of the Christian faith. The radical wing of the Reformation deprived the Protestant church of the beauty and wealth of religious art. The repudiation of family altars by Filipino Protestants at the instigation of foreign missionaries caused the abandonment of family devotion in Filipino homes and the opportunity to show respect to the aged on such occasions.

Those engaged in witnessing in dialogue must not assume that those of other faiths have no genuine conviction or that their commitment to their own religion is not strong. It is therefore necessary to have sufficient knowledge of the faith and practices of others.

Witnessing in dialogue: A methodology and theology

The best dialogue does not take place in a superficial situation such as a seminar where participants are strangers to each other, but rather in a community where mutual trust and understanding has been built through a life together. There the sharing of religious convictions does not pose a threat but can be deemed as speaking the truth in love.

This enterprise of witnessing in dialogue should evoke in us a sense of humility and a confession that we have not treated others as brothers and sisters and that we "have fallen short of the community which God intends."⁴ Such humility also requires us not to impose on the faithful followers of other religions the finality of our Christian faith. Let them come to that faith which God alone can create. Then it becomes genuine and personal faith. We need also to affirm the moral and spiritual truths present in other religions as gifts from the true God. To deny this is to negate the First Article of the Creed. Like the Roman Catholic Church of the post- Second Vatican Council, we should

reject nothing which is true and holy in these religions, believing that people of other faiths often reflect a ray of that truth that enlightens all people.... The Church therefore urges its members to enter with prudence and love into dialogue and collaboration with people of other faiths and, in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the value in their society and culture.<5>

Witnessing in dialogue in humility is exemplified for us in the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He emptied himself of all superiority and came to us people of other faiths; he became like one of us and obedient even unto death.

Bridges rather than walls are built by genuine witnessing in dialogue, in the way Paul witnessed to the Athenians. He did not condemn them as unbelievers but commended them for whatever little seed of faith was in them. He said:

I see that in every way you Athenians are very religious. For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found an altar on which is written 'To an unknown God'. That which you worship, then, even though you do not know it, is what I now proclaim to you. (Acts 17:22-23)

Small steps and not giant leaps often take place in conversion. Apollos from Alexandria was baptized only through the baptism of John (Acts 18:25) and yet Priscilla and Aquila received him as a brother in the faith. The believers in Ephesus did not know the Holy Spirit (and apparently the doctrine of the Trinity) and yet they were called "disciples and believers" (Acts 19:1-7). In fact, on the basis of verse 5 these people may not even have had the correct faith concerning Jesus and yet verse 1 calls them "disciples." If the Holy Spirit indeed "works when and where He wills," then we can neither demand the right to take personal decisions on matters of faith nor measure orthodoxy quantitatively by the knowledge people have of the Christian faith. The Holy Spirit can and does work through other religions and makes such faith the bridge to faith in the true God and in Christ, the savior. Whatever implicit Gospel is found in other religious traditions is the work of God. The Christian faith is not radically exclusivist; it does not reject other expressions of faith in God simply because these are not fully informed and have not been part of the Christian scriptures and traditions.

We need to recognize the presence of faith and truths in other religions. Christian evangelism had recognizable success because it had the ability to appropriate the truths in other faiths and make these the bridges to deliver the fuller truth in Christ. This is what makes the Christian faith truly catholic.

Witnessing in dialogue must make us admit that all human beings are the children of God. This is the meaning of what we recite in the First Article of the Creed. All are children of God though some do not have faith in Christ. In acknowledging this we avoid one of the greatest temptations of old Israel, namely its exclusivism and its belief that it alone was chosen by God and that God belonged only to it. The sins of Israel are depicted in Jonah's attitude towards the Ninevites and Israel's stance towards the Gentiles and Samaritans. Israel failed in its task of making God the God of all human beings because it refused to witness in dialogue with other nations. Israel lost the opportunity for mission - the mission to be a blessing for all human beings. God has not intended to save only one nation or to save more people from one nation than from others. Thus in dialogue we confess the presence of three parties - the people in dialogue and God Himself who is present among those who sincerely seek Him. We need constantly to be reminded that God loves the whole world and not just a portion of it. Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us all? People of other faiths are therefore our brothers and sisters - maybe separated but brothers and sisters nevertheless. This is an acknowledgment that the image of God is in all people and that Christ as God reconciles the whole world unto Himself and not just a part of the world.

Paul Tillich recommends an acceptance/rejection process in our treatment of other religions. This was the way of the Old Testament prophets who, without denying the realities of other gods and their powers, nevertheless asserted the superiority of Yahweh.<6> Monotheism is not a rejection of the reality of many gods. The First Commandment clearly implies the presence of other gods. Faith in God, furthermore, has not always been defined by scriptures as "faith in Christ" and faith in the Triune God. Should we always assume that saving faith must necessarily be faith in Christ and faith in the Triune God and that these twin fundamentals of our faith must be a prerequisite for all? Can we not say that the heroes of faith in the Old Testament, as listed in Hebrews, had saving faith even though theirs was not an informed faith, i.e. faith in Christ as God and savior? And to stretch our views further, we pose this question. Is it nec-

essary to insist on the dogma of the Trinity when dialoguing with Jews and Muslims before we can consider them "genuine" children of God? Do we really need to explain God in a Trinitarian formula? I am not saying that our understanding of the biblical concept of God is flawed but ask whether we cannot allow genuine believers in God to have a flawed concept of God and still consider them believers? In a similar vein I would like to raise a critical question regarding our sola Scriptura. In witnessing through dialogue, should we always insist on the Bible as the only reference point for the explication of all truth? A fixed biblical canon does not have unquestionable support from the Word of God. We Lutherans have even made witnessing in dialogue much more difficult by our assertion that our confessional understanding of scriptures is the correct and pure exposition of God's Word. Is this not an opportune time for us to review our beliefs on revelation, sola Scriptura, confessional subscription and the Christocentricity of our theology? Do we not need to unlearn some things and view truths from other perspectives?

To be a witness is to be a martyr. Witnessing in dialogue therefore is a pain-filled process. It is putting oneself and one's faith at risk to gain mutual understanding and trust. To engage in this task means to be willing to listen to the critical judgments of others and to admit mistakes. This is the witness of love. To attain this, the Christian must accept to listen in order to learn from the other faith, and take a kind of leap of faith to the other side. In a sense the dialogue partners must become schizophrenic in their faith and hope that in the healing process they will not be what they were before but enriched and "converted." Should a total conversion take place, let that happen because one understands one's native faith and the faith to which one comes. This would be a genuine faith because it has been tested by another faith. But this leap of faith in the dialogue situation is possible only if the partners are "at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious traditions (and ready to) attempt to experience the partner's religion 'from within'." <7> Thus witnessing in dialogue requires a double commitment - a commitment that we have the truth and a commitment that we may be wrong. While intending to convince we are at the same time open to the real possibility of being converted to the other's faith. People involved in dialogue must be convinced that their faith can be enriched or even deepened by the other's witness. Therefore we must allow people of other faiths to truly witness to us and give them the hearing that we would like for our own faith. To

hold in balance both conviction and openness is a most difficult posture to take in dialogue. In conviction we have a weapon and a shield, in openness we become vulnerable. And yet there should be an earnest "experiencing of the other side" as Dr. Visser t'Hooft puts it.<8> Or, as the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches has put it: "To enter into dialogue requires an opening of the mind and heart to others.... It is an undertaking which requires risk as well as a deep sense of vocation.<9> I think E.L. Allen has said it well when he wrote:

The Christian is under two obligations ... one to truth and one to love, and these have equal claim upon him. On the one hand, he must stand by that which convinces him of his truth. Not, to be sure, that he will do so with a closed mind. Rather will he hazard this truth continually afresh by exposing it to all the winds that blow and retain it only because it roots itself the more firmly as a result. On the other hand, he will look with charity, as on all men, so on all manifestations of the spiritual life. He will therefore approach with respect and reverence the religions that have guided men for centuries and continue to do so to this day. He will put on them the best possible interpretation and will be willing to enter into a relation with them in which he will receive as well as give.<10>

How can "a person ... be entirely open while standing with full integrity in a religious tradition."<11> This is the dilemma.

In dialogue we are presented with the opportunity to unlearn misinformation about people and their faiths. We are enabled to learn the values in their own religious tradition which we may appropriate for our spiritual enrichment. We are also given the possibility "to explore new areas of reality, of meaning, and of truth, of which neither of us had even been aware before."<12> Concomitant with this learning process is the acquisition of knowledge concerning other religions "from the adherents of particular faiths themselves and not through hearsay or secondhand sources."<13> We should not interpret other faiths "in terms of the meaning given to them by Christian theology."<14> Appreciating the genius of other religions facilitates proper communication and helps us to look to them for deeper meanings of our own religious faith.

Lest this paper create confusion and misunderstanding, let me

reiterate that its title is "Witnessing in Dialogue." Neither witnessing nor dialogue is a substitute for the other.

Neither respect nor esteem for other religions nor the complexity of questions raised can be taken by the Church as an invitation to abandon, in the presence of non-Christians, the proclamation of Jesus Christ.<15>

Real and serious dialogue involves witness to Jesus Christ. The WCC statement is categoric: "Dialogue for the sake of mutual understanding in particular loses its meaning unless we as Christians bear our witness to the salvation we receive in Jesus Christ."<16> Dr. Visser t'Hooft put this aptly when he said:

As a Christian I cannot do this (dialogue) without reporting to him what I have come to know about Jesus Christ. I shall make it clear that I consider my faith not as an achievement, but as a gift of grace, a gift which excludes all pride, but which obliges me to speak gratefully of this Lord to all who will hear it.<17>

There is a final question which needs to be answered. It is this: "Is it possible to have saving faith without knowing Jesus Christ?" Christians in commitment to their conviction must live with the pain of saying "No." However, in love and in honest doubt, we must be able to affirm that we do not know what will be God's judgment on those who have not had the opportunity to hear the Gospel.

Witnessing in dialogue "stimulates those taking part not to remain inert in the position they have adopted".<18> The strength of our Christian faith rests partly on the counter claims of other faiths. We cannot simply say we are Christians because we were born into this faith and have no other choices. We do have more choices than at any time in history. The claims of other ancient faiths impel us to examine our own faith and make a commitment to it which we might not have done otherwise. And let us not forget the gift of prayer God has given us - to pray for love and wisdom before engaging in any act of witness in dialogue.

NOTES

- <1> John May, "Christian-Buddhist-Marxist Dialogue in Sri Lanka: A Model for Social Change in Asia," in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* XIX, Fall 1982: 720.
- <2> Wesley Ariarajah, *The Bible and People of Other Faiths*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985, p.39.
- <3> G.R. Singh, "Is Dialogue At a Dead End?" in: *National Christian Council Review* CVI, March 1986, 131.
- <4> *Guidelines on Dialogue With People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979, p.9.
- <5> James A. Scherer, "...that the Gospel may be sincerely preached throughout the world: A Lutheran Perspective on Mission and Evangelism in the 20th Century. LWF Report, No. 11/12, November 1982, p.159.
- <6> Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1966, p.31.
- <7> Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* XX, Winter 1983, p.3.
- <8> Reuel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1963, p.38.
- <9> *Guidelines on Dialogue With People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, p.IV.
- <10> E.L. Allen, *Christianity Among the Religions*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1960, p.119.
- <11> David Berger, "Jewish-Christian Relations: A Jewish Perspective," in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* XX Winter 1983, p.13.
- <12> L. Swidler, *op.cit.*, p.4.
- <13> G.R. Singh, *op.cit.*, p.132.

- <14> Donald G. Dawe, "Religious Pluralism and the Church,"
in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* XVIII, Fall 1981, p.611.
- <15> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, p.53.
- <16> S.J. Samartha, ed., *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971, p.51.
- <17> J.N.D. Anderson, *Christianity and Comparative Religion*,
Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971, pp.27-28.
- <18> Samuel P. Schlorff, "The Catholic Program for Dialogue
With Islam: An Evangelical Evaluation With Special Reference
to Contextualization," in: *Missiology* XI, April 1983, p.141.

Thomas Chi-ping Yu

WITNESSING IN DIALOGUE: A RESPONSE

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I. Introduction

I feel privileged to respond to José Fuliga's fine paper. Although I realize that he has a "hot potato" in his hand, I admire him because he is able to handle such a difficult subject courageously and graciously. The paper itself is a mine of wisdom. It reveals the author's sensitivity as well as his conviction. Moreover, it is also a comprehensive outline for witnessing in dialogue.

II. The urgent task

In a religiously pluralistic society like Asia, it is not unusual for people of different faiths to live, work, and even worship in the near neighborhood. And it is also quite common for members of the same family to live under the same roof and to subscribe to different religions. For this reason dialogue and witnessing become an inseparable part of the daily reality. Fuliga expresses his concern that such "unintended witnessing and dialogue" may have "both enriched and weakened the nature of the Christian faith". Besides, the fact that, after four centuries of missionary work, Christians are still a rather insignificant minority makes the witnessing in dialogue an exigent and imperative task.

However urgent such a task may be, Fuliga points out that it is also "a painful and difficult undertaking - a kind of martyrria, a martyrdom." Though it is, to use the title of Scott Peck's book, *A Road Less Traveled*, such a journeying together provides real possibilities for genuine encounter and mutual enrichment. For us such a soul searching exchange may lead to a deeper appreciation of our faith and compel us to reach a clearer and more relevant articulation of the Gospel which will draw the attention of the people of other faiths to the heart of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

III. What witnessing in dialogue should not be

The second part of the paper contains a good number of warnings against improper ways of engaging in witness in dialogue. Here are some of them for our attention:

1. Witnessing in dialogue is not neutral or non-committal.
2. It is not competition, nor obnoxious confrontation.
3. It is not a display of superiority.
4. It does not seek to destroy other faiths by emphasizing their faults and weaknesses.
5. It does not set up an agenda and priorities without the consent of the other party.
6. It is not an attempt to impose one's own views.
7. It does not see "winning them over" as a priority.
8. It does not harbor unwarranted prejudice toward another faith.
9. It does not assume that the convictions of the followers of a different religion cannot be genuine.
10. It does not exploit thought categories and language heavily weighted with traditions which are alien and unintelligible to the dialogue partner.

IV. What witnessing in dialogue should be

Fuliga spells out the "should nots" of witnessing in dialogue and he also brings out those qualities which are conducive to genuine encounter and fruitful interaction with other faiths. To list just a few:

1. Witnessing in dialogue implies commitment to one's faith. It is a process of faith meeting faith.
2. It implies open and unprejudiced communication between human beings of the same Creator.
3. It means listening humbly and seriously in an effort to "unlearn" our acquired misconceptions about the faith of the other and to learn about the uniqueness of the other's enduring heritage.
4. The most natural setting for witnessing in dialogue takes place in a community of mutual trust and respect rather than in an artificial setting such as a conference room.
5. It means readiness to confess the sins of our arrogance and maltreatment of people of other faiths.
6. It does not impose upon the dialogue partner the finality of the Christian faith.
7. Like the self-emptying Christ, we should dialogue and witness by sharing truth in love.
8. As we witness in dialogue we seek to build bridges rather than to erect walls.
9. Witnessing in dialogue involves three parties, God and the two human participants. We look at faith in

- Christ as the work of the Holy Spirit, and a gift of God.
10. Witnessing in dialogue means a leap of faith to the other side. By making such a leap we take a real risk, but it is a risk with God and with the incarnate God.

V. The delicate balance

Highlighting the "should nots" and "shoulds" in regard to witnessing in dialogue must make us more than ever aware of the fact that engagement in dialogue is like walking on a tight rope or sailing in deep und chartered waters. As I read the paper, I found quite a few areas of tension which I would like to point out:

1. The tension between witness and dialogue, or between witnessing without dialogue and dialogue without witnessing.
2. The tension between being truly open and being tenaciously firm.
3. The tension between identification and differentiation.
4. The tension between conviction and compromise.
5. The tension between relativity and finality of the revealed truth.
6. The tension between emphasizing the lowliness of Christ and his exaltation and Lordship.
7. The tension between stressing only one way and stressing many.
8. The tension between affirming the merits of other religions and losing our grasp of biblical principles.
9. The tension between the boldness to proclaim the gospel and the hesitancy and timidity in sharing it.

To maintain a delicate balance when faced with such tensions is a matter of fear and trembling rather than lightheartedness.

Finally I would like to raise a practical question which is related to the congregational level: What kind of "theology in dialogue" is most suitable to equip lay people for dialogue and witness?

In order to test the soundness of theology in dialogue as well as the principles with which we operate in dialogue and witnessing, I wish that a down-to-earth case study or a verbatim account of the actual process of dialogue had been included as an integral part of this symposium.

Yoshikazu Tokuzen

TRADITION IN DIALOGUE: THE CASE OF LUTHER AND LUTHERANISM

My assignment is to speak about the understanding of Luther and Lutheran tradition in regard to other religions in the framework of this symposium's theme. I have recently been encouraged through different sources to recognize the importance of understanding religions theologically.<1> This presentation is thus a sort of preliminary report of my recent study on this topic in which I concentrate mainly on Luther.

Studies in the past

K. Holl's well-known essay, *Was verstand Luther unter Religion?*, dealt with Luther and religion. It was first presented on October 31, 1917, in Berlin on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the 95 Theses and became one of the classical works of the so-called "Luther Renaissance." Holl tried to show how Luther understood true religion in the light of his Reformation theology by describing the Middle Ages, his development and his view on religion in this respect. However, Luther's understanding of and attitude towards religions in general are not brought out. The religion which Holl discussed was Luther's religion as Reformation Christianity and mainly concerns the basis and concretion of Luther's relationship with God. W. Kapp in his *Religion und Moral im Christentum Luthers* (1920) also used a similar approach to the theme, dealing with religion and ethics and the relationship between both. Ritschl and his theological thought provided a common background to these studies, although we also find a strong influence from the Luther Renaissance, especially in the case of Holl.

H. Vossberg's monograph, *Luthers Kritik aller Religion. Eine theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung zu einem systematischen Hauptproblem* (1922) also discusses Luther and religion. The starting point here, too, is how Luther understood Christianity as religion. Vossberg used the same background as Holl and Kapp but tried at the same time to analyze what were Luther's critical norms when viewing religion in regard to the whole of church history, including the Catholicism of the Middle Ages, Judaism, Islam, and the ancient religions. This study therefore offers basic, although limited, information about the theme "Luther and religions."

H. Kraemer considered that the attitude of the Reformers, including Luther, towards religion and religions had been positive. "The great reformers wrestled with the problem of the relation of God's revelation in Christ to religion and religions.... They wrestled with it in the full sense of the word, and laid down some capital principles of approach. For the first time in the history of the Christian church a true theology of religion and religions was designed." <2> Then, dealing with Calvin, Luther and Zwingli, Kraemer showed their standpoint toward and interest in religion, and summarized their basic understanding.

In comparison, C.H. Ratschow was unique in dealing with the question of religion. He described Luther's, Melancthon's and Calvin's understanding of religion from a theological point of view and summarized Althaus, Tillich and Barth on religion. He then discussed the possibility of a "theology of religions." He showed us Luther's theological approach to religions by analyzing mainly his disputations of the 1530s, but did not touch at any point on Luther's concrete attitude towards other religions which he knew. <3>

Luther knew Islam, was interested in it and knew something about it. He referred to Muslims as "Turk" or "Turks." Therefore, if we try to discuss Luther's relation to religions concretely, we should deal with "Luther and the Turks" or "Luther and Islam." Vossberg's study offers basic material in this respect, but it is interesting that several studies are also found in the periodical *The Muslim World*. <4>

Luther's theological understanding of religion

Luther spoke about religion on many different occasions and in many different contexts. He often declared that Christianity was the true religion and that other religions were false. Since I will quote from different sources of his later work on Turks and the Qur'an in the next section, I will now introduce "Luther on religion" by using his *Large Commentary on Galatians* (1531/35).

The main theme of Luther's *Galatians* is Law and Gospel, and Christ who stands between them - in other words, the accusation of sin through the Law, or its theological use, and the establishment of righteousness by Christ. This is also his starting point when he discusses religion. "The other use of the Law is the theological or spiritual one, which serves to increase

transgressions. This is the primary purpose of the Law of Moses, that through it sin might grow and be multiplied, especially in the conscience.... Therefore the true function and the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgement, and the well-deserved wrath of God. Yet this use of the Law is completely unknown to the hypocrites, the sophists in the universities, and to all men who go along in the presumption of the righteousness of the Law or of their own righteousness. To curb and crush this monster and raging beast, that is, the presumption of religion, God is obliged, on Mt. Sinai, to give a new Law with such pomp and with such an awesome spectacle that the entire people is crushed with fear" (WA 40, I, 480; LW 26, 309). Through the Law and its main theological use the fact becomes manifest that human religion neither knows nor recognizes sin, but is rather a result of self-justification.

On the other hand, in Galatians Luther emphasizes strongly that Christ was victorious because he struggled with this Law, suffered from its severeness and tyranny and carried the burden of the Law. "It is Christ's true and proper function to struggle with the Law, sin and death of the entire world, in such a way that He undergoes them, but, by undergoing them, conquers them and abolishes them in Himself, thus liberating us from the Law and from every evil... If you grasp Christ as He is described by Paul here, you will neither go wrong nor be put to shame. Then you will be in a position to judge about all the various styles of life and about the religion and worship of the whole world" (WA 40, I, 569; LW 26, 373).

With the theological use of the Law, that is the recognition of sin, and the work of Christ, namely by the negation of self-redemption, Luther makes clear what should be our viewpoint for understanding religion theologically. The theme of "Law and Gospel" which Luther developed in his commentary on Galatians results in a cognate theological understanding of religion.

Religion and reason

In *The Disputation Concerning Man* (1536), Luther defines the human being as "an animal having reason, sensation, and body," and goes on to say "that reason is the most important and the highest in rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of this life, the best and something divine." Furthermore, "it is the inventor and mentor of all the arts, medicines,

laws, and of whatever wisdom, power, virtue, and glory men possess in this life" (WA 39, I, 175; LW 34, 137). But religion is also an endeavor of human reason. Luther understands religion as the highest endeavor of reason, but he points out its limits and problems. The knowledge of God and/or efforts of self-redemption without Christ are "the highest of wisdom, righteousness, and religion about which reason is able to judge" (WA 40, I, 603; LW 26, 396).

Luther recognizes that religion depends upon the human knowledge of God. "By nature all men have the general knowledge that there is God" (cf. Rom. 1:19-20). "Besides, the forms of worship and the religions that have been and remained among all nations are abundant evidence that at some time all men have had a general knowledge of God" (WA 40, I, 607; LW 26, 399). The understanding of the natural knowledge of God in orthodoxy, and the discussion of *Uroffenbarung* in Paul Althaus are a sort of echo of this understanding of Luther. But this knowledge of God is not even of God as the creator. In *The Disputation Concerning Man*, it is said that philosophy does not know the cause for certain nor that the efficient cause is God the creator (WA 39, I, 175; LW 34, 138). At the beginning of the "disputation fragments" it is recorded that their disputation also touched on these themes in a similar way: "They (the Gentiles) have indeed known God, but not as creator.... To know God is indeed something else than to know that he is the creator of all things. For the most excellent knowledge of God is to know that he has created all things" (WA 39, I, 177; LW 34, 140). Already in regard to the creation, the limits of the general knowledge of God become evident. Therefore, even if the act of worship is concentrated on the creator and his works, and reason judges it as most spiritual, yet it can be concluded that "this action is a 'work of the flesh' according to Paul." Because "they think about God, about Christ, and about things divine, not on the basis of the Word of God but on the basis of their own reason" (WA 40, II, 110; LW 27, 99), the Christianity which Luther knew in the form of the Roman Catholicism of his day is criticized as a religion of works, of human reason.

Religion as a work of human reason justifies the human being itself. "The self-righteous, who refrains from sins outwardly and seems to live a blameless and religious life, cannot avoid the presumption of confidence and righteousness, which cannot coexist with faith in Christ" (WA 40, II, 16; LW 27, 14). Luther therefore declares that "any doctrine, life, religion that strives to achieve righteousness in the sight of God by means of

the Law or works must be cursed" (WA 40, I, 671; LW 26, 446). "That is the general opinion of human reason in all the sophists and in the whole world about religion and about righteousness that it is achieved by the works of the Law. Reason will not permit this extremely dangerous opinion to be taken away from it by any means at all, because it does not understand the righteousness of faith.... But this sin, each man's personal presumption of his own righteousness, peddles itself as the height of religion and sanctity, because it is impossible for the nonspiritual man to judge rightly about this issue. Therefore this disease is the highest and greatest empire of the devil in the whole universe" (WA 40, I, 477; LW 26, 307).

In a word, such human religion is idolatry. "The highest forms of religion and holiness, and the most fervent forms of devotion of those who worship God without the Word and command of God, are idolatry." As already noted, this action which reason regards as eminently spiritual, is a 'work of the flesh', according to Paul. Thus every such form of religion which worships God without His Word and command is idolatry. "Therefore all forms of worship and religion apart from Christ are the worship of idols" (WA 40, II, 110 f.; LW 27, 87f). Here we find the same correlation between "having a God" and "having somethings in which the heart trusts completely" as in the Large Catechism.

Religion and Christianity

Religion and Reformation Christianity contradict each other. They stand at opposite ends. Galatians expresses this contradiction in a parallel way, both at the beginning and the end of the lectures. By the frequent practice of linking Jesus Christ with God the Father we are taught what is the true religion: "It does not begin at the top, as all other religions do; it begins at the bottom" (WA 40, I, 79; LW 26, 30). "What Paul and any other saint or Christian regards as divine wisdom, righteousness, and power, is regarded and condemned by the world as the utmost foolishness, wickedness, and weakness; and, on the other hand, what the world regards as the ultimate in religion and the worship of God, the faithful know to be the worst possible blasphemy" (WA 40, II, 174; LW 27, 136). Here the paradoxical character of Luther's theology that sees, judges, and recognizes things *sub specie contraria* is quite clear. In other words, Luther here sees religion and Christianity under the category of the "theology of glory" and the "theology of the cross," respectively. Therefore, "compared with this sacrifice and worship of the devout, all the religions of all the nations and all the

works of all the monks and selfrighteous people are absolutely nothing" (WA 40, I, 362; LW 26, 229). This is the total negation of all religions by the Gospel and true Christianity.

Such opposition and contrast also leads the faithful under the sign of the cross. Religion cannot but persecute true Christianity and the faithful. This was the case with Paul, as Luther noted from Paul's letter to the Galatians. "For everyone who was powerful, wise, learned, or religious hated, persecuted and spat upon Paul, stepped all over him and slandered him" (WA 40, I, 633; LW 26, 418). In their sight Paul was really an objector to and destroyer of religion. "He is a seditious and blasphemous fellow who preaches a message that not only subverts the Jewish commonwealth, so beautifully established by divine laws, but also abolishes and undermines the Decalog, our religion, our worship, and our priesthood. Throughout the world he is spreading the so-called Gospel, from which endless troubles, seditions, scandals, and sects have arisen" (WA 40, I, 644; LW 26, 426). Luther understood that this was also the same in his case and that of the faithful. He also was condemned and attacked by the Papists. They argued that his "teaching is seditious and blasphemous because it disturbs the status quo, overthrows religions, plants heresy, and, in short, is the source of every evil" (WA 40, I, 646; LW 26, 427). The Gospel, the word of grace, was condemned "as a dogma dangerous to both religion and state" (WA 40, I, 677; LW 26, 451).

Luther and the Turks

Our next task is to see how Luther applied his theological understanding of religion concretely. He knew something about the ancient religions, but very little about religions of his own period, and usually spoke of their adherents as heathen and gentiles. Luther had some knowledge of Judaism and Islam and usually referred to adherents of Islam as Turks.

Luther put all Jews, Turks, Papists and Fanatics in the same category and, given his theological understanding of religion, this was quite natural. He repeatedly spoke of these religions in Galatians. Their outward aspect is very different but their substance is of the same root. "For if the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost" (WA 40, I, 48; LW 26, 9), and "they put Christ the Mediator out of their sight, speak only of God, pray only to Him, and act only in relation to Him" (WA 40, I, 76; LW 26, 28). In a word, the fact that they all do without Christ is common among them.

Since Luther tried to understand all religions from his theological center, he concluded that all religions were the same in their root and substance.

In his own situation, the Christianity of his period (namely the Papists and the Fanatics) which bore the name of Christ but despised Him was much more dangerous than Judaism and the "Turks," who were explicitly against Christ. And it is characteristic in Galatians that he attacked the Fanatics more than the Papists, which is very common in his later treatises. They were much worse than Turks and Jews. It is quite natural if Jews and Turks mention nothing about Christ, but since the Papists, who bear the word and name of Christ, do not mention that they obtain righteousness and salvation by the grace of Christ, they are much more problematic. The nearer Luther comes to Christianity, the stronger and more severe he becomes in his theological understanding and criticism of religion. That means that his theological understanding and criticism is the sharpest sword when applied to himself and his own religion, which could turn in a moment into a merely human religion.

Luther and the Qur'an

The fall of Constantinople, the end of the East Roman Empire in 1453, and the invasion of Europe by the Turks under Emperor Soleiman were very important events for Europe. People not only spoke about "the threat of the Turks" but saw their invasion as a sign of the end of the world. Luther therefore also wrote about the Turks in his early and later treatises. (The theme "Luther and the Turks" would need a separate study.)⁵ In the *Explanations of the 95 Theses* (1518), he already criticized the majority in the church for thinking about nothing but the war against the Turks and maintained that that war was a fight against God, since the Turks were a rod from God to punish the wicked (WA 1, 535; LW 31, 91f). For him it was more important to repent than to plan a "holy war" or "crusade" against the Turks. This was Luther's basic stand up to 1526. After 1526, under the military threat of the Turks, and especially in 1529 and 1530, he wrote several treatises on the war against the Turks. He felt that it should not be undertaken as a religious war under the Pope but rather as a defensive war under the leadership of the Emperor. He also encouraged the people to fight with a good conscience. At the same time, he saw the Turks as enemy in the eschatological sense and warned that repentance must be the first step in facing the end of all things.

Luther's first concrete concern was to gather precise information about the Turks and the Qur'an in order to encourage people to fight a defensive war against them conscientiously. It was in this context that in 1530 he published, with his own preface, the book *Libellus de ritu et moribus Turcorum*, written by a Dominican monk who had been held captive for many years by the Turks in the 15th century (WA 30, II, 205-208). From the preface it seems probable that by that time he had already read the *Refutation of the Qur'an*, written by Ricardus, a 13th century Dominican, as well as the *Cribratio* by Nicolaus Cusanus.

By February 1542 Luther had obtained and read for the first time the full, although poor, Latin translation of the Qur'an. As a result he changed his evaluation of Richardus' picture of the Turks. The negative picture which had seemed to him to be very one-sided now became rather credible. In the same year, he made a free German translation of Ricardus' book and published it with an appendix of his own, *Refutation of the Qur'an*. This describes Muhammad and his followers who lie openly, have many wives at a time, execute harsh judgements, and are the outward enemy of Christianity; however, they are not the Antichrist. According to Luther, the Pope and his followers, who have the Word of God but do not listen to or believe in Him, are really the inward enemy and the Pope is the Antichrist. Christians should therefore reject this inward enemy and come back to their Lord before dealing with the outward enemy. Ricardus had written his *Libellus* with the intention of converting the Turks to Christianity. Luther's intention, when he translated the *Libellus* and wrote the preface to it, was to encourage those who had to fight against the Turks, or who were in Turkish captivity, not to fall for their false teachings but to strengthen their own faith by rejecting their inward enemy before the outward one.

Luther consistently maintained that, in order to be able to fight against the Turks and Islam, it was very important to know them better, and that for this one needed to read the Qur'an in a better translation. At that time, however, the Qur'an was a forbidden book and the translation printed in Venice in 1530 had been confiscated and burnt by order of the Pope. Even in Protestant Basel, the City Magistrate forbade the publication of the Latin translation. Bibliander, a seminarist in Zurich, made a more credible translation that was ready for printing in 1542. It was printed secretly with a preface by Philip Melancthon who justified this endeavor. However, before it could be published, the City Fathers were informed, the publisher was put in jail,

and all copies were confiscated. The publisher wrote a letter to M. Bucer who forwarded it through Philip of Hessen and the Elector of Saxony to Luther. On October 27, 1542 Luther wrote to the Magistrate of the City of Basel (WA Br 10, 161- 163). It seems that Wittenberg had expected to have this translation ready for the fall book exhibition in Frankfurt. Luther understood the Magistrate's reaction but noted that, if one reads the Qur'an, it becomes evident how cursed, shameful and hopeless this book is and that, therefore, Muhammad and the Turks would be more harmed by publishing the Qur'an than by military power. The preacher who has the Qur'an in hand will be strengthened in faith and become able to encourage people to fight and work for the sake of genuine Christian teaching. If the City of Basel could not give permission, the Wittenbergers would take the responsibility to publish the Qur'an by taking over all printed copies. On December 8 the Magistrate replied that the City would allow publication of this translation under the condition that no mention be made of the publisher and the place of publication and that no copies be sold in the City. Only the name of the translator, "Bibliander of Zurich," was mentioned on the front page. Luther wrote a preface (WA 53, 569- 572) which was first printed at the beginning of 1543, and added to the translation.

In that preface Luther expressed almost the same opinion as in the letter to the Basel Magistrate. In the same way that the apostles had to fight against the false teaching of the pagans, the church has to know how to reject the enemies of the Gospel. Muhammad and the Turks are in the same position as the Jews, the Papists, the Anabaptists and Servetus. Luther used more than one third of this preface to speak about the Jews before mentioning the name "Muhammad" but this is understandable because he had just written *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*. According to Luther, one should not be afraid to have the Qur'an in one's hand and read it. The church should be strong enough to recognize false teaching which denies the truth of the prophets and the apostles. He declared that faith and love for the truth of the Gospel can be strengthened by comparing it with the foolish and blasphemous teaching of the Qur'an.

Luther wanted to obtain more accurate information about other religions and tried to make available to others what he had learned. Finding out more about the Qur'an is only one example of his concrete concern and interest. He felt that being able to read the Islamic scriptures would provide not only knowledge about that religion but would also strengthen faith in the Gospel.

Today it is very important for us to learn from Luther how to look at and understand religions, including our own Christianity, in the light of the Gospel. We should also remember the efforts Luther made to obtain more knowledge about other religions. On the one hand, we have to learn to apply his theological understanding of religion as to our faith. But on the other hand, since his was a theological understanding, we have to look for the possibility of an application of his insights to the faith of others. Our starting point might be to see religions in the context of the limits of human reason while looking at the universality of Christ. We might then find a positive meaning of religions in terms of the civil use of the Law. By noting Luther's focus and concern, I expect that we could in turn get a wider perspective.

The search for Lutheran identity in the "dialogue with religions"

I have shown that Luther was eager to obtain information about other religions, to understand them, to make a theological evaluation and criticism of them, and to accept them to a certain, though limited, extent. As the comprehensive study by P.F. Knitter shows, Paul Althaus adopts a similar stance when he deals with religions in the framework of his concept of *Uroffenbarung* and in the context of his understanding of "justification by faith alone."

This shows, on the one hand, that we need to do our theological work with a more open heart and mind but that, on the other hand, we should recognize religions only as "*preparatio negativa*."

At the same time, however, we must then raise the question whether we can speak about "dialogue" with religions in the same sense as in the internal Christian ecumenical dialogue. In ecumenical dialogue it is presupposed that the partners are equally ready to understand and accept others and even to have their attitude and stance transformed. For example, it is presupposed in the Lutheran dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church that the Catholics might become Lutheran or we Catholic or that both of us might become more Christian. Can we speak about "dialogue" with other religions in this sense?

In our search for a Lutheran identity in Asia, we are now at the point where we must consider whether we should try to develop our Lutheran understanding and tradition or whether we should

simply give up our Lutheran identity in order to enter the new area of doing theology in "dialogue with other religions." I would personally stand with the Lutheran identity, but do so with an open heart, and aware that we need to come to a deeper understanding of other religions.

NOTES

- <1> Furuya, Yasuo, *Shukyou no Shingaku* (Theology of Religion), Tokyo, 1985.

Knitter, Paul F., *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, London: 1985. Idem, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions. A Case Study of P. Althaus and Contemporary Attitudes*, Marburg: 1974.
- <2> H. Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1958
- <3> C.H. Ratschow, *Die Religionen, Handbuch systematischer Theologie*, vol. 16, Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1979.
- <4> Wolf, C.U., "Luther and Mohammedanism," in *The Muslim World* 31, 1941, 161-177.

Grilis, E., "Luther and the Turks," in *The Muslim World* 64, 1974, 980-193; 275-291.
- <5> Mau, R., "Luther Stellung zu den Türken" in: *Leben und Werk M. Luthers von 1526 bis 1546*, Berlin: 1983, 647-662; 956-966.

John G. Strelan

TRADITION IN DIALOGUE. THE CASE OF LUTHER AND LUTHERANISM: A RESPONSE

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Yoshikasu Tokuzen must be thanked for leading us to reflect on a rather difficult aspect of our heritage, namely Luther's attitude toward other religions, and his dealings with representatives of other religions. I call it "difficult" because when we come to talk about tradition in dialogue in terms of the Reformation and the Reformers, we encounter a world and a set of attitudes which appear, on the surface at least, to be far removed from our own. The result is that it is not at all certain that Luther and his peers would have even begun to understand what modern theologians mean when they talk about "dialogue."

Luther's world was one in which a pioneer Christian Hebraist like Johannes Reuchlin, the great-uncle of Philip Melancthon, could be persecuted because of his championing of Jewish literature. It was a world in which the Jews were viewed with much suspicion and hatred, and accused of an amazing range of wicked practices. It was a world in which the Turks (and hence Islam) were the enemy, a genuine political threat to Europe. It was a world in which the Qur'an was a forbidden book; merely to attempt to have the book published in a reasonably good translation was a bold action, let alone having it read and studied by Christians.

Our heritage is also "difficult" in the sense that Luther presents us with a challenge which we cannot dodge when we consider the matter of dialogue: Luther was first and always and only a theologian of the cross. His attitude to, and dealings with, other tradition was always determined by central theological considerations, not by political, sociological, or pragmatic concerns.

It is true, Luther frequently had intercourse - what we would call "informal dialogue" - with representatives of Judaism. He often entertained Jewish scholars at table, especially in his younger years, and had long debates and discussions with them. And with regard to the Turks, Luther must surely have not been so politically naive as to be unaware of the fact that in some ways he and the Turks could make a common cause against the Pope. There is an interesting little episode recorded in the *Tischreden*. Luther had been informed by a member of an imperial

mission to the Turkish Sultan that Suleiman had been very much interested in Luther and his movement, and had asked the ambassador Luther's age. When they told him that Luther was 48 years old, Suleiman had said: "I wish he were even younger; he would find in me a gracious protector." On hearing that report, Luther is said to have made the sign of the cross and said, "May God protect me from such a gracious protector." (Behüt mich Gott vor diesem gnädigen Herrn) (WAT. II, 508, 17). So by all the rules of strategy and power politics, Luther and the Turks should have been allies. Yet Luther rejected the alliance - on theological grounds. Always, ever, and only the theologian.

Tokuzen points out that Luther was keenly aware of the value of obtaining accurate information concerning another religious tradition, and Luther also knew the value of having conversations with adherents of another faith. He recognized that such study and conversations made one more aware of one's own convictions; they helped a Christian to see what was peripheral and what was essential to the Christian faith.

Tokuzen suggests that we could take as our starting point for dialogue an examination of human reason in the light of the universality of Christ. Tokuzen does not enlarge on his proposal. Alongside of that proposal I would place another, which is by no means in contradiction to, or opposed to, that made by Tokuzen. I would propose that the focus of dialogue be that which makes the difference between Christianity and other faiths, namely Christology. We could follow up a hint given by Luther to the effect that the Jews should first be introduced to the human Jesus before being required to accept the deity of Christ. In a sermon preached on February 14, 1524, Luther said that if a Jew comes to him who is not stubborn and whom he wants to bring to Christ, he would not begin by telling him that Christ is God's Son. He would first instill in him a love for the Lord Jesus, telling him that Jesus was a man sent from God. Later he would follow up and explain that Christ was God (WA XV, 447).

Luther is here, of course, interested in conversion, not dialogue. But do we, perhaps, have here a hint that a Christology "von unten" is a productive road to travel in dialogue with men and women of other faiths?

Choong Chee Pang

**DIALOGUE IN COMMUNITY: THE PROBLEM OF CONFLICTING
SOCIO-ETHICAL VALUES
A Singapore Case Study**

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I

In October 1978 a Moral Education Committee was appointed by the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education of Singapore, Dr Goh Keng Swee, "to examine the existing moral education programme in schools and to recommend ways to develop a programme that would suit the specific educational needs of Singapore" (Report on Moral Education 1979). Members of the Committee included top national leaders.

The Report of the Committee was completed in May, 1979. In the "Conclusion and Recommendation", it states that "The principal objective (of moral education) should be to produce good, useful and loyal citizens through inculcation of the desired moral values and social attitudes." What is of interest and significance is the fact that the Committee accepted the suggestion of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on "the ideal Singaporean" as the basis of their recommendation on the proposed syllabus for the Moral Education Programme. This is how Prime Minister Lee defines "the ideal Singaporean" in his comment on an earlier document, the "Report of the Education Study Team":

The litmus test of a good education is whether it nurtures citizens who can live, work, contend and co-operate in a civilised way. Is he loyal and patriotic? Is he, when the need arises, a good soldier, ready to defend his country, and so protect his wife and children, and his fellow citizens? Is he filial, respectful to his elders, law-abiding, humane and responsible? Does he take care of his wife and children, and his parents? Is he a good neighbour and a trustworthy friend? Is he tolerant of Singaporeans of different races and religions? Is he clean, neat, punctual and well-mannered?

Singapore leaders feel that what ultimately shapes and moulds the character of a citizen are "the desired moral values and social attitudes." There is also the assumption that national leaders can decide for the citizens what are, and what are not, "desired" moral values and social attitudes. The Report on Mor-

al Education 1979 includes, among others, the following moral values and social attitudes:

A. PERSONAL BEHAVIOUR

Habit formation: Manners, hygiene and cleanliness, safety, diligence, dignity in labour, courtesy, punctuality, thrift, physical fitness.

Character Development: Integrity, honesty, self-respect, honour, courage, incorruptibility, perseverance, faithfulness, patience, humility, spirit of inquiry, obedience, self-discipline, temperance.

Altruistic Characteristics: Filial piety, respect for elders, loyalty, tolerance, love and humanity, kindness, forgiveness, trust, impartiality.

B. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Sense of Belonging to the Community: Civic consciousness, respect and care for others, care for public property, respect for law and order, safety, harmony, group spirit, love for the school, co-operation, friendship, neighbourliness, generosity.

Respect for Cultural Heritage: Understanding and appreciation of one's cultural heritage, understanding of and respect for others' cultures and beliefs.

C. LOYALTY TO THE COUNTRY

Love of Country: Sense of national identity and commitment, protection and upholding of the democratic system, defence of our country, patriotism, loyalty, justice and equality.

Spirit of Nation Building: Appreciation of the efforts made by our forefathers in building the nation and their contributions to national development; understanding the progress of Singapore and the pioneer spirit, understanding the internal and external threats to Singapore's survival and prosperity.

A comparative study was made of the moral education programmes in Taiwan, Japan and Russia. With the exception of the Russian model with its strong emphasis on the "communist character" and Marxist and Leninist precepts, the other countries (Singapore, Taiwan and Japan) seem to have much in common. Their moral val-

ues and social attitudes are very "East Asian" in character, and very "Confucianist" in spirit. It is interesting to note that religion does not seem to occupy a prominent place in any of the four countries. (This is obvious in the case of Russia). However, it is significant that at the end of the Recommendations, the Committee observed the following on the role of religion in moral education:

Religious studies help to reinforce the teaching of moral values. The Ministry of Education should review its policy to allow mission schools greater flexibility in implementing their religious instruction programmes.

It is equally significant to note that in 1982, only three years after the publication of the Report on Moral Education 1979, religious institutions representing the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Buddhist, and Hindu religions were asked by the Ministry of Education to help train teachers for religious education in all Singapore schools. Confucianism was soon added to these world religions. Compulsory religious instruction in all secondary schools became effective in January, 1984.

Most of the moral values and social attitudes which are outlined in the Report are of a universal nature. There is obviously a considerable degree of "continuity" between them and the biblical teaching. Christians will not find subscription to them particularly difficult.

II

This part of the paper will address problems of conflicting socio-ethical values in the area of Christian and secular/humanistic perception of life. It will deal particularly with two controversial issues - assisted human reproduction (or artificial reproduction) and abortion.

Professor S.S. Ratnam, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the Singapore National University, issued a report on problems related to assisted human reproduction. This report noted that there was increased demand for artificial insemination with donor semen (AID) for a number of reasons. The decline in the number of babies available for adoption as a result of the fertility control programme, the increasing awareness of male infertility, and the acceptance of AID as a form of treatment.

However, this AID programme had been suspended since 1981 because of a lack of donors. Professor Ratnam's report also discussed various aspects of invitro fertilisation in Singapore.

What is more disturbing and of concern at the moment is the current abortion law in Singapore. The Act of 1974 liberalized abortion and resulted in a five-fold increase of legal abortions, with "epidemic" proportions reached by 1979. Today, Singapore suffers the dubious reputation of having one of the highest abortion rates in the world. It may be useful to provide a brief historical synopsis of the abortion law in Singapore.

Abortion Law in Singapore

Before 1969, it was a statutory crime to induce abortion (Sections 312-326 and 511 of the Penal Code).

The Abortion Act 1969 allowed for abortion under the following five categories:

- 1) Strict necessity indication - "that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve serious risk to the life of the pregnant woman."
- 2) Therapeutic indication - "that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve serious injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman."
- 3) Socio-economic indication - "that the environment of the pregnant woman, both at the time when the child would be born and thereafter as far as is foreseeable, justifies
- 4) Foetal indication - "that there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped."
- 5) Juridical indication - "that the pregnancy is the result rape or of incest or of unlawful carnal connection or of intercourse with an insane or feeble-minded person."

That Act also:

- 1) Set up the Termination of pregnancy Authorization Board, from which approval was required for all abortions, with two exceptions - in the cases of necessity or therapeutic indications, when two medical practitioners concurred, or when treatment was

immediately necessary to save the life of the mother.

2) Stipulated that abortion be done in a Government hospital or in an approved institution.

3) Set the time limits when abortion was not permissible:

- In the case of necessity, therapeutic and foetal indications, not later than 24 weeks, unless treatment was immediately necessary to save the life or to prevent grave permanent injury to the mother's physical or mental health.

- In the case of socio-economic and juridical indications, not later than 16 weeks.

4) Specified the mother to be a citizen of Singapore, or wife of a citizen, or if not either of the above, to have been resident in Singapore for at least 4 months immediately preceding the date of treatment.

5) Required the consent in writing of the mother. In the case of an unmarried mother who was less than 18 years old, consent must be obtained from a parent or guardian.

6) Allowed for conscientious objection in carrying out abortions to medical practitioners, who refuse to do so unless such treatment was to save life or to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the mother.

7) Determined that the medical practitioner performing the abortion had to possess requisite medical skills.

The Abortion Act 1974 removed the four safeguards provided under the 1969 Act:

1) It abolished the Termination of Pregnancy Board.

2) It removed the five indications of abortion and made it legal when "performed by a registered medical practitioner acting on the request of a pregnant woman with her consent."

3) An unmarried woman under 18 years of age could seek an abortion without consent from parent or guardian.

4) Abortion could be performed during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy. (The same exception applied in the case of treatment being immediately necessary to save life or to prevent

grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman).

The Abortion (Amendment) Act 1980 introduced two main features:

- 1) Medical practitioners wishing to perform abortions had to receive prior authorization from the government.
- 2) The category of women able to have abortions was widened, to include a holder, or the wife of a holder, of an Employment Pass or Work Permit.

In his review on induced abortion in the world, Tietze (*Induced Abortion: A World Review* 1983, The Population Council, New York, 1983) reported that 39% of the world's population lived in countries where abortion was available on demand, including Singapore. In some of these countries parental consent was required if a woman was unmarried and below the age of 18. Some countries required a waiting period of up to one week between application and performance of abortion. In Singapore, neither of these stipulations apply. Another concern is the fact that teenage abortions and the practice of repeated abortions are on the increase in Singapore.

Serious Christian Concerns

1. There is little doubt that the liberal abortion law in Singapore has helped to control population growth, as well as eliminate illegal back street abortions. However, laws based on expediency or pragmatic reasons alone are not sufficient; there must be sound moral and spiritual foundations.
2. One-third of present-day pregnancies end in abortion; two-thirds of abortees do not even give reasons for so doing. These figures do not augur well for Singapore society. They not only reflect a general disrespect for human life but such callous attitudes can affect attitudes toward the living, towards premature babies, the handicapped, chronically sick and the elderly. They are symptomatic of the serious erosion of the moral fabric of Singapore society.
3. Christians believe that sexual union between males and females should be practised only within the bonds of marriage (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:28-31). The fact that 25% of abortees are unmarried gives rise to concern. It reflects a

casual attitude towards sexual matters and this can only undermine the stability and health of a society. Many factors are undoubtedly involved (other than a liberal abortion policy), leading to increased permissiveness in society.

Some theological statements

1. God the Creator of the universe is the Giver and Sustainer of life. He alone has the prerogative to give as well as to take away life. (Allowance for taking away life is given only in extreme cases and under very exceptional circumstances such as capital punishment and in war.)
2. The sanctity of human life does not rest only on the fact that God created it, but also because God set human life apart from the rest of the created order - blessing it, sanctifying it and making human beings His image bearers. The treatment of human life should therefore be clearly distinguished from that given to all other biological lives.

God's creative work is not only dynamic and effective, it is also sacred and mysterious in nature. The sanctity of human life thus assumes a particular, mysterious character and must be recognized and respected by all.

3. Although the Bible bears clear and consistent witness to God as the ground of human beings and the ultimate source of life, it does not speculate on the "how" and "when" of human life, i.e. **how** and **when** life begins. Yet there is every reason to assume that, as far as the Bible is concerned, human life begins from the moment of conception (Job 31:15; Ps 22:9, 127:3, 139:13,14; Ecc. 11:5; Is. 44:2,24; 46:3; 49:1; Jer 1:5). In this sense an embryo (earlier stages of uterine development, up to about five weeks) or a fetus (subsequent stages of uterine development after the fifth week or so), should no longer be considered as mere "organism" but as **life itself**. Any scientific experiment on embryo or fetus must therefore be regarded as experiment on life itself.
4. Human life does not exist in a vacuum or in isolation. The beauty of human life and potential reaches its fullest expression and ultimate fulfilment in relation to others, to God as well as to human beings. Of all human relationships the bond of marriage is undoubtedly the most decisive, exclusive and intimate. It is a life- long commitment of one man to one woman. The only natural and divinely ordained

procreational process takes place in the bond of marriage and through the sexual union between husband and wife.

5. Artificial insemination such as AID is a violation both of the natural procreational process and of the intimacy and sanctity of sexual life in the bond of marriage.

AID and other methods of artificial insemination can easily lead to sexual irresponsibility, confusion of kinship and relationships and the loosening of family ties and can seriously call into question the parental duties of men and women.

6. In genetic engineering, sinful and fallible human beings are in real danger of infringing upon God's prerogative as the giver of life. They become the masters not only of their own destiny but also of that of others.
7. Genetic engineering when "successful" and "popular" could be in danger of becoming so commercialized that all sanctity of human life and human dignity may ultimately be lost.
8. Eugenics are basically concerned with the physical and mental well-being of a person whereas the Bible has a far more holistic view. Undue emphasis on the biological make-up of people can easily give rise to a general disrespect for the physically handicapped, sick or elderly. Human beings' "worth" is not determined by their physical and mental well-being, however important, but in terms of their relationship to God and other human beings. It is their relationship to God which ultimately determines their destiny.

These statements are not meant to be a systematic presentation of the Christian position on the issue. They are only intended to illustrate the problem of conflicting socio-ethical values in a community in which avenues of meaningful Christian-secular/humanistic dialogue are not only necessary but must also be fully explored and actively pursued.

In order to avoid generalizations, and in due recognition of the complexity of diversity of the Asian contexts, the paper has taken a case-study approach within a very limited Singapore context. However, it is the opinion of the present writer that the problem illustrated is, in varying degrees, relevant to other Asian contexts as well.

Walter Altmann

DIALOGUE IN COMMUNITY: A RESPONSE

General observations

In order to deal with the problem of conflicting socio-ethical values, Choong Chee Pang chose to prepare a Singapore case study. Although this makes my reaction more difficult because of my lack of knowledge of the Singaporean reality, I wish to express appreciation for the methodological choice. This brings us to the realm of concrete reality. We can test - to some extent at least - what "dialogue" can really mean in a particular issue. The choice of the cases concerning the perception of life seems to me to be most commendable. The cases address very topical issues and the questions dealt with are experienced both by Christians and non-Christians, and touch central concerns of our faith.

I also wish to express my appreciation for Choong Chee Pang's theological assertion on which he evaluates the issues raised, namely the Christian commitment to life grounded in God's creative work and, I would add, for us Christians, in God's redemptive work through Christ. I very much agree with the emphasis on the value of life itself, and in particular on the need to defend those who are weak and defenseless. The beauty and depth of human life was rightly stressed, as was the biblical holistic view of the human person. All this is fundamental, and I express my appreciation for it, even if I do not emphasize it in this brief response.

Another reason for my satisfaction with Choong Chee Pang's concrete approach is that very often the churches, especially minority churches, tend to evade tackling these issues or to restrict themselves to the realm of moral denunciation in the Sunday sermons. This evasion of concrete social questions has been wrongly understood as the necessary result of the Lutheran so-called Two Kingdoms doctrine. According to this false understanding, questions in the social and political realms are left to an autonomous rationale of the secular forces. The church should restrict itself to preaching God's grace in the spiritual realm, sometimes with the equally restrictive addition that it be done to individuals, not to society. Nevertheless, this radically contradicts all that Luther himself did, since he never refrained from expressing what he understood to be God's will

for any realm of social life, be it education, commerce, poverty, politics, peasant issues, war, etc. He may well have made mistakes but never through omission. God is the Lord both of the spiritual and the secular realm.

In dealing with the questions of assisted human reproduction and abortion, Choong Chee Pang expresses his grave concerns. Here I would like to ask him to whom he intends to address these concerns primarily. I can see two possible addressees: the Christian congregation or the community in general, perhaps specifically the policy makers. One approach would be more of a pastoral nature, the other more of a public witness in the political arena. I felt the lack of this important distinction. Of course, the one does not exclude the other, but nevertheless there are two tasks with a different emphasis: one would be to strengthen the options to be taken by Christians, perhaps even against prevailing values within the surrounding society, and this is meaningful. The other task would be to contribute to the shaping of a better social order, and this is equally necessary. I suppose - but am not totally sure - that Choong Chee Pang has primarily the latter in mind, especially since the given theme is "dialogue in community." But in spite of the fact that we have a case study, there is no indication where this concrete dialogue is being carried on, what reactions there are from the dialogue partners. Is it an ongoing dialogue or something still in the planning stage?

Specific questions

In raising specific issues, you will of course understand my difficulty, since I am not a Singaporean nor even an Asian; in fact, I have never been to Singapore at all. My remarks therefore derive much more from curiosity than from knowledge, and are of a somewhat intuitive nature. On the other hand, I suppose that the invitation extended to me meant to provide a feedback from another reality and from a different perspective, namely a Latin American one. Thus I will dare to voice some impressions and one hypothesis, and expect to learn from your reaction to my reaction. My questions and remarks are intended to stimulate the dialogue among us, and I hope they are not unduly provocative.

In a first part of the paper, Choong Chee Pang describes the moral values and social attitudes that are to be developed in Singaporean society through the educational process. These values and attitudes are universal in nature and based on Confu-

cianism and Choong Chee Pang sees no particular problem for Christians to adhere to these. In the second part, he presents the case of assisted human reproduction and abortion, coming to the conclusion that they reveal a "general disrespect for human life" and a "serious erosion of moral values." Thus, on the one hand, there is considerable discrepancy between the moral values and social attitudes to be developed, and the given concrete reality on the other. Am I correct in thinking that Choong Chee Pang hopes to contribute towards a better legal and social order in Singapore through dialogue among Christians and non-Christians on the question of moral values and social attitudes? I confess that I had some difficulties on this point. Let me try to explain them. Choong Chee Pang showed us through the example of abortion how rapidly both laws and attitudes have changed within Singaporean society. Up to 1969 there was a very strict abortion law and within a few years abortion was completely liberalized. My concrete question is: How did such a drastic shift come about? Or stated more precisely: What concrete realities within Singaporean society caused so rapid a change in the abortion question? I feel that Choong Chee Pang has not dealt with what is in my view a basic question (and this would be my main criticism to this otherwise very good paper).

As I said, I can only raise questions and hypotheses, but I dare to do so. Do we note a conflict between tradition and modernization? Should we then align ourselves with tradition against modernization? Or: What are the specific realities behind the changes of law and attitudes? I suspect that the prevailing reason is of a socio-economic nature. (From someone coming from Latin America you would not expect any other kind of suspicion.)

Given the capitalist industrialization process, a different way of organizing society, specifically in the production of goods, would bring about the disregard of given moral values and provoke changes in social attitudes. If this assumption is true, at least partially, then it is insufficient to address such concrete issues as abortion on the moral level alone; rather we will have to address them on the level of a given or an intended economic order. And our moral anger, if legitimate, will have to be directed against the prevailing and evil-doing order.

Precisely because I agree with Choong Chee Pang on the theological centrality of the dignity of life itself, I would ask: Is it not true that the capitalist economic order - especially in Third World countries - establishes a price for human beings, and that there is therefore an unavoidable tendency to commer-

cialize life itself? If you sell arms to Iran in order to free American hostages in Lebanon, and give the money to Nicaraguan "contras," how many Iraqis and Nacaraguans is each North American worth? What is the value of an Indian affected in Bophal by a big chemical industry? Choong Chee Pang denounces the commercialization of the beginning of life, but is it not part of the logic of a system in which life itself also becomes something to be consumed?

I stated a general hypothesis which would of course have to be tested in detail. For example: Why do people suddenly adopt the practice of abortion so easily in spite of inherited moral values against it? Do the women need to keep their new professional activities or are they afraid of losing their newly acquired position of free consumer which they could not easily maintain with (more) children to take care of? What dividing lines run through our societies that cause some people to pay to have a child and other to abort it? What are the underlying interests in promoting the liberalization of abortion? Is it fear of a possible uprising of the poor masses against the new industrial order?

Conclusion

Let me summarize my observations. I appreciate the careful and detailed case study presented by Choong Chee Pang and concur with his theological thrust and perspective. I have, however, the impression that the examples given must also be seen within the framework of the Christian's responsibility, through dialogue in community, towards a better social order in general and a more just economic order in particular.

Andrew Chiu

MINISTRY AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN DIALOGUE

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I would like to begin my reflections with some remarks that are pertinent not only to my assigned topic but also to the areas covered by others and to the general theme of our symposium.

"Dialogue," by definition, is conversation - two parties talking or, one may even concede, two parties arguing. So defined we are quite used to the terminology and to the action itself. Who does not know how to talk and argue! However, what we often forget or neglect is the fact that for each participant, 50% of any dialogue is made up of listening. And that poses a difficult task for theologians! Even when we are willing to concede the necessity of listening in dialogue, we must recognize that we are not trained to do this. Theologians are trained to become experienced speakers and our seminary curricula all include courses in speaking (Public Speaking; Homiletics; Apologetics, etc.). But you will not find a course in learning how to listen (although such courses do exist elsewhere) in any of our school catalogs. We have all given much thought to what constitutes a good speaker and that is a legitimate concern which we do not wish to denigrate.

"Christian spokesperson" is a phrase that comes quickly to our mind, as well it should. God has "entrusted to us the message of reconciliation," as St. Paul puts it in II Cor. 5:19, God is "making his appeal through us." But all too often we have understood this trust to be a license for religious monologue, diatribe, and the monopolizing of every conversation. There are several contributing factors. One is the strange notion that Christian theologians, by some unusual form of osmosis with the biblical repository of revelation (and along with that a peculiar notion of the character of Scripture itself), have themselves obtained the correct answer to every question possible - even those not connected in any obvious way with religion. A second contributing factor to this "talk-fixation" is, in many instances, the character of some Protestant worship traditions, where a once-valued emphasis on preaching has somehow developed, sadly, into "two hymns, a prayer and 80% talking by the preacher."

These two major factors, the theologians' training in speech and their propensity for constant talk, conspire to make theologians

in general poor listeners. We are not good at dialogue.

How to be good listeners in dialogue

If dialogue means 50% listening, let us try to list what makes a good listener:

- 1) The first mark of a good listener is the most obvious, but needs constant repetition. If we are to be listeners we must stop talking. (The willingness to do this conveys important personal qualities, and even, potentially, institutional ones.)
- 2) Our silence must be accompanied by real listening. That is, we must have a genuine interest in what our dialogue partners have to say. This goes beyond merely "allowing them to speak" - we must actually hear them. All of you have no doubt had the experience, either your own or someone else's, when the period of "not- talking" is consumed in "planning what to say next." How often have we had to say, after our moment of "not talking," "I'm sorry, I didn't hear what you said."

"Not talking" and "listening" are two very different things. Dialogue requires listening.

- 3) We must expect to learn from and be changed by what our partners in dialogue say. They will easily discern whether or not this willingness is present. People know when someone is listening to them. If we have some prior conviction that our dialogue partner cannot affect either us or our message, our dialogue is only a pretence, a monologue with intervals.
- 4) Good listeners shape their own speech according to what their dialogue partner has said. This does not mean abandoning one's own convictions, but indicates that the partner in dialogue is not "plastic" but has become a true partner whose being and convictions and expressions are acknowledged and recognized within the dialogue as being of value. It also signals to the partner that we, as listeners, are ourselves genuine persons and not programmed robots. Many attempts at Christian witness falter because of assumed superiority and "know-all" attitudes. In dialogue we must go beyond "getting our piece said"; we must have real interest in the partner as a person and not just as the recipient of our own talking.

- 5) Good listeners must acknowledge the value and validity of what they hear. This is much more important than "allowing time" for others to speak. If we cannot do this, we should in all honesty not engage in "dialogue as a device" - a false forum for more of our own talking.
- 6) Good (and skilled) listeners will also "hear" more than what is said to them. They will discern their partner's pain, joy and hope and accept and acknowledge them.
- 7) Good listeners will be alert to providing physical surroundings that are conducive to dialogue and which reflect good listening habits. In institutional situations this means a variety of venues, including "neutral" ones, where dialogue partners do not feel overwhelmed by the institutional appurtenances of one party to the discussion.

To sum up, good listeners must give up the presumption of omniscience and preoccupation with their own words.

But does this mean that "the other" always gets to set the agenda? We think not. The dialogic theologian's center of confidence must be shifted from his/her own person and verbal formulations to the spirit which guides Christian witness. We are thinking here not only of particular apostolic experience (see Acts 1:8 and 2:4) but of our Lord's promise recorded in Matthew 10:19-20, "Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour, for it is not you who speaks, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." We believe we can add a pertinent reference here to the general revelational role of the spirit (see II Cor. 3:6 - we have a ministry that is of a new covenant "not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life") and to the advice of the Apostle Peter (I Peter 3:15) that gentleness and respect for others should attend every expression of the Christian hope. What greater sign of respect could there be for those to whom we wish to impart the Christian Gospel than that we prove to be good listeners! It is a quality that finds expression in joyous exclamation in the Psalms when many a petitioner says of God, "I cried to you, O God, and you listened!"

Particulars of Ministry and Theological Education in Dialogue

Let us now single out some particulars which offer promise for carrying out ministry and theological education in dialogue in

Asia, with its multicultural situation and varied religious traditions.

It must be said first of all that, with few exceptions, institutions of theology in Asia are structured after Western models. This affects all aspects of our schools: administration, curricula, the training of faculty and students, and, for the more part, even the physical layout of buildings. The Asian theology student and everyone else receive a clear message: "Here you enter foreign territory." The reason for this must be found in the past and is presumably in part the result of the attempt to approximate the educational experience of Western missionaries (later reinforced by Asian educators who went overseas for study and returned to duplicate their former surroundings). Institutions so modeled also serve to reassure foreigners who have supported their development.

As far as I am aware, no comprehensive and comparative study has been undertaken on the structure of religious institutions of higher learning of the major historic religions of Asia. Here is a potential point of dialogue. We are surely correct to assume, given the extremely long history of the great Asian religious traditions, that their institutions of learning have evolved more in tune with Asian ethos and cultures, whereas Christianity in Asia adopted Western models. Our awareness of this situation is therefore potentially profitable. Although we must not think that we can simply identify a truly indigenous Asian pattern and then adopt it, we can expect to learn something that may advance the process of the indigenization of Christianity.

A thematic consideration of dialogue as an educational model suggests two very practical items at this point. The first might be the teaching of comparative religions in our schools by qualified spokespersons who are practitioners of other faiths. The student in such a setting would have a much better chance of gaining an "inside" understanding of the faith structures and practices involved, instead of the now current "outside critique." In the process, persons of various convictions gain practical experience in how to pursue theology "dialogically." The second suggestion is related to the first and is that Christian theology students be exposed to the institutional settings and structures of learning of other faiths by visits to the places where this instruction is actually being carried on. I am well aware that these suggestions will often meet with opposition from the boards and councils that operate our schools;

still, with proper planning and consultation, such practices could be realized with benefits to all parties concerned.

Nevertheless, each specific area of Asia will have to look at its own situation here. In the case of Hong Kong, we have a city with a modern and Western face without a pervasive Asian cultural or educational history. Second, third and fourth generation Hong Kong Christians have in many cases lost touch with their cultural roots, and this adds yet another dimension to the problem of dialogue.

In my view, we educators should seek partners in dialogue who can help us to see what is the Asian tradition for training the religious, the scholar, the community leader, the helper and enabling person. How can this help us in our task as educators for the church of Jesus Christ? What are the meeting points of "institution" and "culture" in the different Asian areas? What are the Asian cultural marks that give "credentials" to the religious functionaries at various levels?

The second level of dialogue on this point is to examine the impact of economic and social development (i.e., change) on these Asian institutions, in dialogue with Christian institutions. How do such changes affect us all, and what kind of patterns emerge as a result? Perhaps we will find that some are doing better than others in being in tune with both the past and the future and this may help us to avoid pitfalls.

I believe we need extensive dialogue between theological institutions and their own constituencies. Those of you who have been involved, as I have, in the accreditation process within the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA), are aware of the problems faced by the younger churches in establishing and operating educational systems and seminaries based on Western models. The strain shows at every level, not only in respect of finance (the most visible) but also of staffing, libraries, subventions for students, and so forth. It is an all too familiar story. And yet what is at the base of all this is but the culturally intrusive nature of our institutions. Surely a certain "mark" of an indigenous institution is that is indigenously supported. That this is not the case should by no means be seen as an indication that the churches are poor. The real reason is that the Western style seminary has been adopted from a situation where it could be supported and maintained and put into a situation where this cannot happen. (Increasingly there is no support in the West either.) An

institution maintained with overseas funds will always be a "foreign object" in its own surroundings. To find out what must happen to make our institutions of higher Christian learning truly Asian we need to have dialogue between educators and the people of the Asian churches. The answers will not come easily.

This kind of dialogue needs also to take place at a second level: in too many cases our institutions, as foreign objects, produce "ministers" or "educators" who are also immediate foreign objects in their community, in terms of skills, education, manner of thinking, aspirations and expectations. Historically, they may have been "creatures" of the missionary, made in his image - but we are now passing beyond the point where that is an adequate explanation. They are now "our creatures." We must ask the people of the Asian churches what they think of them? We cannot simply say, "Here is your pastor," or "Here is your Christian educator," until we know what they really need and want. Dialogue again is the way to do this.

The pervasive poverty of the Asian churches and the Asian peoples calls for dialogue in yet another direction. Asia has produced not only religions but ideological movements as well. These movements are born out of the historical and present-day experience of the people and reflect their self-understanding and their aspirations. Though the movements have different names in different areas, they share many characteristics because of the oppressive sameness of much of the Asian experience. While we can quite easily claim that the church belongs among the masses, we cannot assume that the church can uncritically give its blessing to either the historical/social analysis of the people's experience or to the various programs put forth for improvement. The church thus needs to be engaged in dialogue with ideologies, both in the area of analysis and in the articulation of aspirations.

This is by no means an easy task. If theologians are rarely easy partners in dialogue, ideologues are even less amenable participants! Then too, the discussions that do occur are often beset with faddism, taken up with fashionable posturing and sometimes easily seduced by the new and the different. So at this point we have to call for two separate kinds of dialogue. The first is between Christian theology (and theologians) and ideologies. The second is a dialogue between those of our Lutheran tradition and other traditions on the subject of the popular ideologies and movements in Asia.

My recent reading has brought to mind several specific problem areas of biblical exegesis and constructive theology as Asian theologians address themselves to some currently popular movements. In this effort it is strikingly evident that those in the Lutheran tradition would want to contest certain points of view and engage in dialogue both with their own tradition and from it as a base. Time does not allow us to be too particular and thorough on this point today, but let us indicate the direction in which I think such a dialogue might proceed.

A major principle for the Lutheran approach to theology is Luther's "Two-Kingdom" articulation. How does this affect our evaluation of liberation theologies (under whatever name) or for that matter liberation movements which disavow any kind of theological link?

1. Liberation theologies devolve a "paradigm" from the scriptural Exodus traditions which goes beyond what traditional Lutheran hermeneutics allows. The "particularism" of Israel as the people of God and their role in salvation history as bearers of revelation is flattened out by liberation theologies to present a divine pattern for political activism - indeed it is sometimes equated with divine action.

What then becomes of the ephapax of our soteriology? Since liberation theology takes its point of departure from the Old Testament and deals in a critical way with what has been called "the scandal of particularity" involving Israel as the people of God, I must mention a related point. In the years since World War II theology in the West has been enriched greatly by dialogue with Judaism. Much of this dialogue has been centered on the questions raised by the Holocaust and the phenomenon of anti-Semitism. The absence of large Jewish communities in Asia means that our students are dealing with an almost totally unknown quantity when it comes to Judaism. At the same time, their developing attitudes, often reflected in papers and examinations, indicate an anti-Semitic reading of the biblical materials. We as Christian educators ought to be concerned about this and take measures to counter it. I am not optimistic, however, that this can be done by means of direct dialogue with persons of the Jewish faith. Other models will have to be sought out.

2. The currently faddish term "doing theology" often conceals an elevation of the theological enterprise cut loose from its revelational source, and substitutes style for substance.

3. The substitution of action for "grace" seems to belie the "gift" nature of the biblical teaching of the Kingdom. What can Lutherans contribute here?
4. The flirtation of ideologues with Marxism seems blind to the Marxist historical record of pervasive oppression, repression, suppression and the grossest exploitation of those whose suffering brought the ideologues into positions of influence. How can we explain this attraction in the face not only of the experience of the masses, but of the Christian churches in particular?

Lutherans have something to say here because our theology includes an anthropology which precludes naive ideological expectation.

We need dialogue here because Lutherans have a need to express Lutheranism that is not pacifist, quietist, or supportive of the status quo. Our Lutheran heritage can contribute to sociological analysis and amelioration, while it probably cannot espouse and bless most popular movements - not because it denies the people's hopes, but because it holds a greater hope and an empowered, Spirit-led message of liberation that is properly suspicious of ideology. To have dialogue on this issue requires that we be fully engaged with the social issues of our time and place. We cannot demand a right to have a critical voice in arenas from which we are withdrawn. I can report that in Hong Kong the Lutherans, and the Protestants in general, are very visibly present in social service institutions, and are well positioned to be even more influential in speaking and acting on issues of social conscience.

Finally, let us mention one area of dialogue which is just now underway in Southeast Asia. We refer to the emerging "Doctor of Pastoral Studies" (DPS) program, already in use in Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan and soon to be introduced in Hong Kong. In this program, the students are men and women with several years of pastoral experience in churches who undertake case studies in theology in collaboration with theological academics and other specialists. In effect this program is a theological dialogue between Christian educators and the practitioners of ministry. It may prove to be a decidedly better form of dialogue than that experienced by our seminary graduates who, soon after their graduation, begin to remark, "The Seminary never prepared me for this!" We may rightfully expect that educators who participate in the DPS program will get all kinds of "feedback" that will influence school curricula and teaching methodologies, while the

student participants, because of their experience, will feel that they are participating on a more equal basis in the learning process, and will gain a new appreciation for the reflective side of the theological endeavor. Thus, we have here a potentially model form of dialogue.

Let us close with some words of St. Paul to the Romans (1:11-12) related to our topic: "I longed to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."

Sun Hoi Kim

MINISTRY AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN DIALOGUE: A RESPONSE

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According to the Scriptures, dialogue is wisdom. Let me begin with reading the Proverbs 15: 22-23: "Get all the advice you can, and you will succeed; without it you will fail. What a joy it is to find just the right word for the right occasion!"

Our Lord tells us, through the wisdom literature, about the importance of dialogue in the lives of God's people. But he also tells us of the need for qualitative dialogue, even though we need the multitude of counselors. Andrew Chiu's paper showed me the importance of training people and putting dialogue into practice. Meaningful dialogue is not possible if those who undertake it are not adequately equipped. We must have quality as well as quantity in our dialogue, specifically with other committed people in our ministry of outreach.

I would like to react to Chiu's points from my experience of ministry in Korea. The question here is what we need to do to prepare ourselves for meaningful dialogue with other faiths.

Chiu answers this question with the concept of "good listening." Dialogue is both talking and listening to each other. Listening is critical when it comes to the dialogue between different faiths. Chiu rightly indicates that we Christians are not good listeners in our dialogue with other religions. However, we need to realize that meaningful dialogue is not possible until both sides are equipped with special technique. Traditionally Christians are not trained for this. It is interesting to note that most theologians are poor listeners, even though listening is essential in dialogue. I am even forced to ask whether we are poor listeners or no listeners at all? We Christians in Korea have never tried to undertake meaningful dialogue with members of other religions which we encounter every day. Ours has always been rather a monologue when we met other faiths. We have not acknowledged them as religions, and have felt that their faiths are nothing but idolatry. Christians have always been in the right and other religions always in the wrong in the matter of faith. The word *dae hwa* (dialogue) in Korean has no connotation of listening; it only means "talking to each other." Aristocratic people do not have to listen, they only need to command. Listening on a basis of equality is a rather new con-

cept for Christian dialogue with other religions. I think this is why Chiu described conditions for good listening and some aspects of the listening technique, i.e. stop talking; show genuine interest; adopt an attitude of willingness; feedback; acknowledgment, etc. In his summary he says, "good listeners must give up the presumption of omniscience and preoccupation with their own words."

However, the question remains to be asked whether we can train the other party in dialogue technique, even if we are able to train ourselves to become good listeners. We may listen to them but they may not listen to us. What if we Christians, while listening to shamanism, inevitably became shamanistic Christians? A pastor who hears and responds to people's needs that concern only this world's blessings may easily become a kind of shaman to his members. What I want to point out is that we can talk about dialogue with other religions in theory but that, in our experience, it will be very difficult to carry on a dialogue. It reminds me of Luther in his discussion about the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. He said that it is easy to talk about it but very difficult to distinguish between them in actual experience. We may tend to impose our faith on others or we may compromise our faith in the name of dialogue. Would this not be a deception in order to persuade others? Would it not be a way of compelling others to change their worldviews or their concept of God? We often have to do so with a gentle voice, even though it is God's compelling love to accept Christ as the Savior. Listening is a receiving action. By listening to others, how can we confer our unique message to those who do not want to listen? In his Psalms, David said that God listened to his cry, but how can we make Gentiles hear what God says to them?

In regard to the Western pattern, it depends where the church is. In the case of Korea, we could preserve more indigenous patterns, especially in the work of local congregations, such as early morning prayer meetings, all night prayer meetings, regular home visits and other traditional patterns. Nevertheless, it is true that we are being cut off from our own roots and becoming Western in our thinking and doing. Chiu indicated that the fourth generation of Hong Kong Christians have lost touch with their cultural roots. On the other hand, in Korea, the shamanistic people think of Jesus as a Western spirit. Shamanists, Buddhists, and Confucianists in Korea would not talk with the Western spirit. They would think the people of the Western spirit need to become a little more like oriental spir-

its, so that they can talk with them. In their value judgment and with their world view, the shamanists are hardly concerned with their future lives. For instance, the concept of blessing is meaningful only when it deals with the here and now. The concept of the last judgment has nothing to do with their lives in this world. Many Christians even prefer to talk about the God who works here rather than what He will be doing in the future; they have been trained that way by their shamans for more than 4000 years. We need to know that it is not easy to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

Traditionally, Korean people at first thought of their gods as cloud, wind, and rain. These three words represented god-talk, especially for farmers. They were the three things they could not control, so they thought about the highest deity to control them. A blessed, abundant life came to them with the help of the cloud-god, the wind-god, and the rain-god. This was the way through which their god or gods protected them from poverty and other physical hardships.

We need therefore to train ourselves how and what to talk about when we engage in dialogue with people of other faiths. Dialogue between ministers who are trained on Western models and people with a more indigenous type of mind is not easily meaningful. There are many black-haired Westernized ministers who have abandoned their own kind of thinking and doing. A few years ago, the Worship Committee of the Lutheran Church in Korea asked a Korean professor of music to compose Korean music for our liturgy, such as the gloria in excelsis, Kyrie, etc. The chairman of the committee was an American. The committee invited all the Korean Lutheran pastors, introduced them to the new liturgy and discussed the possibility of using it in the local congregations. Interestingly, few of the Korean pastors liked it, while the American missionaries were ready to use it. We still do not use this setting, not because of the American missionaries but because of the Westernized Korean pastors. Lay people in the congregations like the Korean type tunes very much.

Another point which Chiu raised was in regard to the dialogue with new ideologies. He referred to Luther's "Two Kingdom" concept. According to our experience, it is better for ministers not to become more directly involved with ideological movements than is necessary. Some pastors who followed new ideologies inevitably became involved in political matters and were often in prison. It is our experience that God's right hand must be dis-

tinguished clearly from his left hand. We need to distinguish between changing people's hearts through the Gospel on the one hand and changing their physical conditions through socio-political forms on the other. To be sure, we Lutherans must not be pacifist, quietist, and supportive of the status quo, but we need to have one primary target, which is the people's hearts. Our work of training people and doing our ministry must be anchored in the lives of Christians who encounter other people of other faiths every day. What an easy thing to talk about but what a difficult thing to carry out in our lives. Luther once said that it is not what we believe but how we live that counts.

GROUP REPORTS

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Report from Group I

1. Dialogue

Definition of dialogue: The group was basically in agreement with Paul Rajashekar's paper as a starting point for our discussion.

The difference between inter-faith and ecumenical dialogue. Although there are formal and structural similarities between inter-faith and ecumenical dialogue, the following differences were noted:

Assumption: In ecumenical dialogue it can be generally assumed that we speak from a common faith; this cannot be assumed in inter-faith dialogue.

Method: In ecumenical dialogue, we seek to translate our ideas into the language and thought patterns of the partner to see if they can work, but in inter-faith dialogue the process seems to be the reverse, so that we seek to understand the categories of the other as far as we can within the frame of reference of our categories (e.g. nirvana and the kingdom of God).

In ecumenical dialogue the goal is to try and reach a greater agreement or unity, whereas in inter-faith dialogue the goal is more that of understanding and being challenged.

The necessity for dialogue: As we live in a common world we are faced with our differences and our common human problems. Dialogue is a theoretical necessity because of the plurality of our Asian cultures, heritages, religions and world views. Dialogue is a practical necessity because of our Asian cultures, heritages, religions and world views. Dialogue is a practical necessity because in our different commitments we face common human problems that we must address together (e.g. abortion).

How to begin in dialogue

In dialogue with others, our expression should be a loving one. We need to be open, friendly, and seek to listen and learn from the expressions and sentiments of people of other faiths.

Although dialogue starts from the external level, there is always an internal dialogue that goes along with it.

The role of tradition in internal dialogue: Integral to the internal dialogue is the place and function of the central affirmations (or core or memory) of one's own tradition. This is brought into dynamic relationship with the new situation created by the external dialogue.

2. Criteria

Open canon: There was some sense of disquiet about the question of an "open canon" as raised by José Fuliga in his paper. Does this mean that new norms on a par with already existing scriptural norms are to be accepted? This question should be dealt with carefully.

Paradigm: What criteria does one use to evaluate one paradigm (see Christopher Duraisingh's paper) over against another paradigm? This question should be looked into.

3. Dialogue and ethics

Part and whole: The issue of abortion in Singapore (Choong Chee Pang's paper) raised many important ethical issues. Amongst these is the question of the relationship of the part to the whole in two senses:

In the case of abortion, one part (the mother) decides the destiny of another part (the fetus), and in socialist societies the group decides the necessity of abortion on the part of the individual. What is the ethical and theological relationship between part and whole in this situation?

How does one bring the ethical visions of the differing faiths to bear in a significant way upon particular ethical issues in a specific situation. How do the many parts share in a common vision?

4. Dialogue and theological education

Curriculum: In the Asian context, doing theology must be undertaken in living relationship with existential issues. This has implications for the development and orientation of theological curricula. In particular, the dialogical context amongst faiths needs to be reflected in curriculum development.

DPS: On the question of the DPS program (Andrew Chiu's paper), it was felt that we should be cautious about following the Western model of education completely. Theological education should be done in a living situation within the Asian context.

Scriptures: With regard to the papers of Andrew Chiu and Olaf Schumann, it was felt that we should look into the possibilities of including the study of scriptures other than the Christian scriptures in the seminary curricula in a serious manner. In this way traditions can speak to each other.

5. Concluding comments

The group felt that all the papers and responses were stimulating and challenging. Serious reflection on the question of dialogue must not end with this symposium.

At the same time, it was felt that other dimensions of dialogue need also to receive more prominent attention. Among these is a serious grappling with the socio-economic and socio-political contexts within which dialogue takes place.

One aspect of an active engagement in dialogue needs to be our living relationship with people of other religions within each of our respective areas.

Jeremiah Achariam
Group Secretary

Report from Group 2

This report reflects the dynamics and development of our discussions over five days; at the start they were broadly focused and became more informed and directed as the days progressed.

After the first session on Paul Rajashekar's background paper and José Fuliga's paper on "Witnessing in Dialogue," we discussed the question of syncretism. We agreed on the possibility of a "positive recovery of syncretism" which is different from a simple mixture or mixing of Christianity and the traditional. Syncretism in one sense cannot be avoided; however, we must be sensitive to its dangers. So for example the Christian sacraments are not entirely divorced in their content from the histo-

ry and culture of Judaism.

The group discussions reflected an ongoing wrestling with the question of the relationship between witnessing and dialogue. We cannot say that we arrived at a consensus, except to agree that the two are related.

Through the inevitable process of translation, using the language available, our vision should be enlarged. More Bible commentaries are needed which examine the text in the context. Christian education and adequate ministry should be directed towards shaping and strengthening Christian identity so that it is not threatened by dialogue in contexts where Christianity is the in the minority. Fear of losing one's identity through the dialogical process needs to be overcome.

Although Christopher Duraisingh's methodology in his paper "God and gods in Dialogue" was recognized as viable for Christians, it was asked whether it was acceptable or viable for other partners in dialogue as well. Through the discussion we came to see that this methodology was addressed to Christian theologians engaged in dialogue, but not to the other party. It was also pointed out that, when "new corporative self-understanding" and "new metaphors" emerge, they should operate as critical principles for the "memory." We understood that the concepts of "Ultimate Referent" and "symbolized referent" are acceptable to provide a common stage for many non-Christian partners in our dialogue. Some members of the group felt that the title "God and gods in Dialogue" could be misunderstood by Christians outside of the symposium, as implying a legitimization of "gods" other than the Triune God.

Olaf Schumann's paper "Scripture and scriptures in Dialogue" took us back to the discussion about the nature and purpose of dialogue. Learning about the difference in the understanding of Scripture in Christianity and Islam, for example, was of great help in finding a proper counterpart concept in dialogue.

We became aware of the one-sidedness of Christian emphasis on the divinity of Christ, or the "glorified" Christ in Christian history which leaves the aspect of the suffering and caring God aside, when we see it in the light of the Muslim understanding of Jesus Christ. This is a good example of our need for repentance through the encounter with Islam. In the Philippines, the Roman Catholic emphasis is traditionally on the passion of Christ, whereas the church in Latin America always focuses on

the powerful story of Christ the King (who looks like the King of Spain or Portugal); the poor masses, however, have found identification with the weak, powerless Christ in their oppressive situation. Thus a onesided emphasis on the "glorified" Christ can be misleading to people, especially our dialogue partners.

Yoshikazu Tokuzen's paper on "Tradition in Dialogue" stimulated discussion concerning the Lutheran tradition (not Luther's). It was urged that we not fossilize Luther's teaching by going back to him and asking every question of him as if he had every kind of answer. Lutheran tradition must be progressive or processive and the methods used by mission organizations should be thought through carefully. Our theology should be the "theology of the cross," but in practice has it not been often a triumphalistic "theology of glory"? The theology of the cross keeps us humble and helps us to go into dialogue; the risk of the one demanded by faith.

Our discussions continued to examine the background and implications of "Community in Dialogue" as presented by Choong Chee Pang. We discussed the responsibility of Christians contributing to the shaping of community, moral values and giving a prophetic witness in the community. We asked what kind of dialogue is going on in highrise apartments and in Christian schools.

In the discussion of Andrew Chiu's paper on "Ministry and Theological Education in Dialogue," the concern was expressed about using English as a teaching medium and a language for doing theology, although the group recognized the necessity for doing so. Clarification of Chiu's idea in regard to what is "foreign" was made; it is not to turn the clock back but to make Christianity culturally meaningful in such areas as liturgy, hymns, architecture, and even theological concepts. Westernization as a whole is not, and cannot be, denied; however, it is necessary to examine the uncritical borrowing of theological concepts and systems without considering their theological and social presuppositions. In this regard, the group discussed such issues as school systems, requirements for accreditation, a seminary's life style, and teaching and testing methods.

Conclusion

We are impressed with the need for individual Christian communities in Asia, especially Lutherans, to commence the task of dialogue at a level appropriate to the contexts. They also have to

wrestle with the hermeneutical challenge of retaining a genuine Lutheran identity in a cultural and temporal context far different from that of Luther in Germany in the 16th century. Hence part of the task is to identify that which is essential to Lutheran identity, and that which is its cultural dress and outer form, and thus not of the essence.

Naozumi Eto
Group Secretary

Report from Group III

Anyone who is seriously concerned with dialogue recognizes that it is only fruitful if each partner shares openly his/her deepest convictions. However, this should not imply that these convictions are all based on the same presuppositions.

For centuries Christians and members of other religions have lacked information about, and due appreciation of, one another; there has been misunderstanding and antagonism, and this has helped the rise of fanaticism and extremism. We sincerely admit that our arrogance towards others has often denied their human right and dignity. To have both love and witness we need to understand that witness must be undertaken according to the commission of our Lord, and be free from any form of expansionism motivated by human ambition.

Our group affirms the necessity for interfaith dialogue and holds the view that dialogue may be conducted in two basic ways:

- a. Dialogue that is intellectual in nature: This is essentially the meeting of people who are already committed to firm positions.
- b. Dialogue that is conducted in the course of regular contact in daily life between persons who are both sincerely convinced of their faith: The emphasis here is on the personal elements in dialogue.

Without going into the details of the case study presented by Choong Chee Pang, our group feels strongly that dialogue in community on socio-ethical values is no less important than religious dialogue. In fact the two could hardly be separated. The

following is to be noted: in a dialogue Christians should not hesitate to present their convictions on moral values and this should be done in all humility and respect.

The group spent considerable time in discussing some of the Christological issues raised in Duraisingh's paper as well as in the plenary and felt that these issues should be pursued further.

Both Rajashekar's as well as Duraisingh's papers seem to some members of this group not to have stressed sufficiently the important element of Christian witnessing in dialogue. It is the opinion of the group that the element of Christian witnessing must be included in genuine interfaith dialogue (see Acts 17:21; 17:17, 19:8), although the manner of witnessing should be in a true spirit of humility, openness and fairness.

Christians in dialogue with people of other faiths are called earnestly to take as example our Lord Jesus Christ in his dealing with non-Jews; e.g. the centurion of Capernaum (Matthew 8:5-13). In this case Jesus helped the centurion in his worries and needs without pressing him to become His follower. His conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-30) was considered also in this connection. In fact, there are many illuminating examples in the New Testament.

With regard to Olaf Schumann's paper, the group noted the following:

The main thrust of Schumann's paper seems to concern the understanding of Islamic, Buddhist as well as Christian scripture.

The paper has contributed much to our understanding of the position and view on the Qur'an. It is the opinion of the group that the Christian understanding and interpretation of scriptures should be closely reviewed and studied in the light of Qur'anic understanding as well.

Schumann's paper also discusses other fundamental issues such as the nature of the "Word of God", hermeneutics, historical-critical methods, biblical authority, questions on canon, revelation, inspiration, etc. These issues also deserve serious studies and reflections.

In respect of Andrew Chiu's paper "Ministry and Theological Education in Dialogue," the group recognizes the following:

Our group puts much emphasis on the urgent need for indigenous training of pastors/theologians in their cultural context. There should also be curricula at schools and seminaries which provide churches in Asia with indigenous Christian education.

The group appreciates the heritage of Western theological education and recognizes that this heritage should be integrated in indigenous educational tradition in such a way that theological training becomes relevant and functional in the local environment and society.

Although it is true that life everywhere must be consistent with faith, it is even more necessary in the Asian context to stress this aspect of unity in theological training. Asian educational traditions such as those found in Pesantren and Confucianism can contribute to indigenous theological training.

In the case of young students who are sent to theological schools in Western countries, measures must be taken to make sure that they do not lose touch with the cultural and environmental reality of their home country. The first theological degree should generally be taken at home, and studies overseas should take account of the background culture and church life at home.

The group sees a great need for educational material, both in the form of literature and other media, e.g. cassettes and films. The development of the latter is particularly urgent for witness in contexts where for cultural, sociological, and environmental reasons people do not read but rather like to see and listen.

The group notes that Asian theologians with competence often seem to produce theological works for Western consumption (adapting them to that audience). We would urge theologians in Asia to turn their resources and their energy to indigenous needs. We admit that we have ourselves been negligent and that we have tended to depend on theological resources of Western origin as being the easy way, instead of making efforts to provide educational materials ourselves.

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